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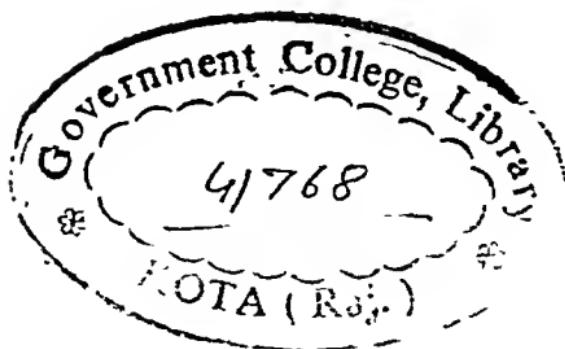
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SURENDRANATH
BANERJEA

S K BOSE

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CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND

Surendranath Banerjea's life and activities form an inseparable part of the history of the national movement in India. Our countrymen will ever remember with love and gratitude his pioneering work and indefatigable labours for the enlargement of the people's rights and liberties. There was a time when he made history. His name was magic, his oratory spell-binding, his leadership inspiring. He was one of those early patriots who have left the indelible impress of their personality on Indian nationhood. But history is a dynamic process, it moves. In the onward march of that historical process, Surendranath came to be cut off, in the later years of his rich and eventful life, from the main stream of national consciousness. His name lost its old magic and his magnificent oratory was silenced in the painful quietness of an enforced political retirement. But the contributions he made to the growth of Indian nationhood and the purposeful evolution of our early freedom struggle were indeed most valuable and have earned him an immortal niche in our history.

The national political movement was a part of the Indian renaissance which started early in the nineteenth century. Beginning with Raja Rammohan Roy, the spirit of reawakening at first permeated the social and cultural life of the country and later manifested itself on the political plane.

Surendranath was in many ways a legatee of the Raja who, in the words of Surendranath himself, "anticipated us in some of the great political problems which are the problems of today". Although the Raja chiefly addressed him-

self to the socio-religious problems, he is also acknowledged to be the father of constitutional agitation in India. He not only defended the freedom of the press but was the first to enunciate the rights and privileges of the people and in the name of the nation to address the Government to be conscious of their duties and responsibilities towards the governed. The method of constitutional agitation initiated by the Raja became the method of Surendranath and the founder fathers of the Indian National Congress.

The immediate social environment in Bengal in which Surendranath grew up needs a special mention. In Bengal, at that time, the hangover of the ultra-radicalism of Young Bengal, a reaction to age-old rigid orthodoxy, was still continuing. Surendranath's father was himself imbued with the rebellious unorthodoxy of Young Bengal. Despite the reckless excesses they indulged in, these radical young men did one very good thing. They helped generate political consciousness among the intellectual class.

A counter-movement against Young Bengal's ultra-radical excesses had also started. Pearaycharan Sarkar, a teacher with a missionary zeal, had started a temperance movement which had the backing of Keshabchandra Sen and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. This movement was aimed at counteracting the drink evil which, in the mad craze for western imitation, had become almost a pervasive phenomenon. Moderate reformers like Vidyasagar and those of his way of thinking had taken up the thread of social reform where Rammohan had left it. By virtue of his scholarship, humanitarianism and high moral character, Vidyasagar had become a force to reckon with in the social life of Bengal. He was a friend of Surendranath's father. When social ostracism faced Surendranath on his return from England, it was Vidyasagar who, along with a few others, welcomed him back to the social fold.

It was again the hey-day of the Brahmo Samaj movement under the leadership of Keshabchandra Sen. The Brahmo call not only came as a challenge to a caste-ridden society crippled by many inhibitions, it also brought a message of personal emancipation and social justice. Political consciousness flowing from the radicalism of Young Bengal reappeared refreshingly among the Young Brahmo group some of whom, like Anandamohan Bose, became close associates of Surendranath in his political work. Their organ, the *Brahmo Political Opinion*, had its own share of politics.

The Great Revolt of 1857 and the Queen's Proclamation of 1858, granting equality of treatment to all her subjects, were memorable events. The latter fostered in the Indian mind hopes of freedom from earlier Company misrule, of equality of treatment and opportunity and of justice within the framework of the empire. Indeed in later years it became with the leaders a sort of an infallible charter on the basis of which they formulated the people's rights and privileges. With the taking over of the administration by the Crown, the whole of India was brought under unified imperial control.

But the intentions of the Proclamation were never carried out. The hollowness of British professions of equality was soon exposed, and it was not long before disillusionment stared the expectant intelligentsia in the face. For one thing the hang-over of the Revolt of 1857 had led to a good deal of racial estrangement between Indians and Europeans. Aggressive exclusiveness took the place of the earlier India-orientation of the British community. For another, under the direct administration, the power of the bureaucracy increased enormously; the bureaucracy was wooden and irresponsible. Economic exploitation of the peasantry, famines and other socio-economic evils mounted

England looked to her two primary interests, administration and trade; she hardly cared for anything else. Nor were even deserving Indians allowed their due share of the higher services and of the local government. Discontent naturally started brewing among the people, particularly among the rising middle class intelligentsia.

It was against this background that Surendranath made his appearance on India's political scene. It was a stormy juncture of the old and the new. It was an age of contradictions, of hope as well as disappointment, and Surendranath came to reap the harvest of both.

CHAPTER II

THE BUDDING HERO

Surendranath was born on November 10, 1848 at his ancestral house in the Taltola region of Calcutta. Settled in a village on the bank of the Ganges near Barrackpore, Surendranath's grandfather, Golokchandra, who was an employee of the Salt Board, started living in Calcutta. The family was an orthodox Kulin Brahmin one, proud of its tradition as well as purity. Golokchandra was a man of kind and sympathetic nature, but at the same time firmly tied to old Hindu traditions. Durgacharan, Surendranath's father, was born in 1819. It is interesting to recall at this distance of time that, while belonging to the old isolationist world, Golokchandra was not entirely untouched by the new spirit. He did not hesitate to impart English education to his son, Durgacharan, whose training in Hindu School, the nerve centre of educational renaissance of those days, made him completely westernised in his ideas and outlook. Durgacharan thus became a rebel, even as the Young Bengal group were, and left behind something of this spirit of revolt in his illustrious son.

It is said that Durgacharan was compelled to accept a job under the Salt Board early in life. According to another version, he was given a teaching assignment by David Hare, that great friend of the Indians. He married early as was customary those days, but lost his young wife soon enough, following an attack of cholera.¹ This made him determined to study medicine, the science of cure. With

¹ *Deshnayak Surendranath* (in Bengali), P. K. Ray

the help of men like David Hare, he had his lofty humanitarian ambition fulfilled, for later he did become an eminent physician of Calcutta. So deep was his human sympathy that he used to examine poor patients free of cost for two hours every day. Surendranath was the second son of Durgacharan by his second wife, Jagadamba Debi.

Thus in the family itself the background was one of a tie between the old world forces and the new, emerging, ones. Durgacharan had drunk deep from the heady wine of western culture, while his father stuck rigidly to Hindu traditions and orthodoxy. The story goes that once Durgacharan's father was so displeased with him that the latter had to flee home.

Surendranath's autobiography, *A Nation in Making*, which is a classic of this genre of writing, gives interesting glimpses into the intimate family life. Surendranath himself says "Thus in our home the two conflicting forces of those times met . . ."² and this was symbolical of the conflict between eastern orthodoxy and western culture going on in every contemporary educated home in those days. The peace of his family was, however, not disturbed by the conflict, he claims; it was rather a case of peaceful coexistence of two opposing forces. Brought up in such an atmosphere, Surendranath came to represent a fine synthesis between the two extremes of Hindu conservatism and western infatuation. Here lay the key to his eventful life's philosophy and work. He had his father's revolutionary zeal moderated in him by his grandfather's basic traditionalism. This made him a patriot without being a firebrand, a reformer without being a zealot, a votary of change, but in an orderly and constitutional manner.

There was nothing extraordinary about Surendranath's

²*A Nation in Making*, Surendranath Banerjea

early life and education. From a *pathshala*, where he was first sent for elementary education, he went over to an Anglo-Indian institution called the Parental Academic Institution where he learned the English language with a mastery which later became the envy even of Englishmen. His educational career at this School, and later at Doveton College, was fairly distinguished; he was a prizeman every year, though not the first on the list.

Durgacharan was very particular not only about the education of his children but also about their health. He had built up a gymnasium in his house and engaged an athlete to train the boys in Indian athletic exercises. Brought up under such a discipline, Surendranath developed a wonderful health. His remarkable physical fitness in a long life of 77 years astonished even Britishers. Surendranath ascribes the exceptional good health enjoyed by himself and other members of his family to the complete absence of child marriage therein. This, he thinks, is an object lesson against early marriage which he mentioned during an interview with Lord Hardinge, who had expressed surprise at his exceptional physical alertness considering his age at that time.

Young Surendranath was breathing an atmosphere of both rebellion and reform. His sensitive nature was unfolding itself, reacting to the trends of contemporary life. The personality of Keshabchandra Sen impressed him very much. He used frequently to attend the meetings addressed by Keshab. Possibly he gathered an unconscious inspiration for his later eloquence from the grand oratory of the Brahmo leader. He says : "Keshabchandra Sen's addresses created a deep and abiding impression on young minds. They drew large audiences. There was a visible religious awakening".³ Next to Keshab, the person who impressed

³ *A Nation in Making*, Surendranath Banerjea

Surendranath most was Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. His widow remarriage movement had raised a sympathetic echo in Surendranath's heart. In his autobiography he tells us how a young Brahmin girl, a neighbour of his, had lost her husband and how as an adolescent he strongly wished her to be remarried. To Vidyasagar he pays the following tribute : "His is an honoured name in Bengal and will, I think, occupy, next to Raja Rammohan Roy, the proudest place in our history".⁴ Last but not the least, Pearaycharan Sarkar's temperance movement seemed to have caught young Surendranath's imagination. He says : "The temperance movement was a great success. We all joined it. We were enthusiastic about it, held meetings and made speeches".⁵ These were all socio-cultural movements. A political movement was yet to be born and the same impressionable, inquisitive young man, Surendranath, was destined to usher it.

⁴ *A Nation in Making*, Surendranath Banerjea

⁵ *Ibid*



CHAPTER III

"STRANGEST VICISSITUDES"

Surendranath speaks of his "strenuous life beset with the strangest vicissitudes". The remarkably arduous and yet unyielding trek along that life's eventful way now began.

The suggestion that Surendranath should proceed to England to compete for the Indian Civil Service examination came from his Principal, John Sime. In his heart of hearts, Surendranath's father had always cherished the idea that his son should receive education in England. Indeed he was so solicitous of his son's welfare that he had drawn up a will directing that the boy should be sent to England for completing his education. The father therefore readily agreed to the Principal's proposal. On March 3, 1868, Surendranath sailed for England along with his two friends. Romesh Chander Dutt and Biharilal Gupta.

Circumstances for an Indian's visit to England in those days were far from favourable, psychologically, socially and materially. A sea voyage was a taboo to the average Indian, and orthodox reaction to it was by no means hospitable. The grim prospect of social ostracism was always there for an England returnee. The mere prospect of a long sea voyage to a far and unknown land, was also frightening for the average Indian. All these prejudices and obstacles had to be got over. Surendranath's father was positively helpful, yet preparations for the journey had to be hatched in secret and the news of the contemplated visit to England was broken to Surendranath's mother al-

most on the eve of his departure, when, on hearing it, she fainted.

On the night preceding their departure, the three young men were lodged at the residence of Monomohan Ghose, who had just returned from England and was strongly in favour of more and more Indians visiting that country. At day-break they took the steamer from Chandpal Ghat, where Durgahearan came to bid Surendranath a tearful farewell, little knowing that that was to be the last meeting between him and his son.

Surendranath reached England in five weeks' time and was received there by W. C. Bonnerjea. Gradually he settled down to his work, laboured hard and passed the open competitive examination for the Indian Civil Service in 1869. He was then a resident pupil in the family of Mr. Ely, a Latin teacher in the London University Collegiate School. It was a clean, happy, orderly English home where he was treated with cordiality.

Now started the period of the "strangest vicissitudes" Surendranath speaks of, indeed an impressive series of them such as are very rare in the life of an average man. Adversity, they say, makes a man. They made a heroic fighter of Surendranath. Through the grim disappointments and strenuous struggles he had to face early in life, his character was steeled into a firm mettle of courage, resistance and heroic self-abnegation.

The first and the biggest disappointment came when, after the publication of the Civil Service examination results, a discrepancy in regard to his age was brought to the notice of the Civil Service Commissioners. The fact was that under the regulations then prevailing, a candidate had to be above 19 and below 21 years of age at the time of the examination. Unfortunately, in his Matriculation Examination form, Surendranath had put down his age as 16 in

December 1863, according to the way of reckoning prevalent among certain sections of Indians, that is, from the date the child comes to the mother's womb, whereas by the English method of counting he was 15 at that time. If his Matriculation age was really 16, he was overage for the competition in 1869, whereas actually and by the English method of counting he was fully qualified for the same.

This explanation submitted by him was not accepted by the Civil Service Commissioners and his name was removed from the list of successful candidates along with that of a fellow student of his, S. B. Thakur, on a similar ground. The decision evoked universal protest and indignation throughout India. Great Indian leaders including Pandit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, Raja Rajendralal Mitra and Kristodas Pal joined in an affidavit testifying to the Indian way of reckoning age.

It was a stunning blow to a young Civil Service aspirant who had voyaged thousands of miles to win the coveted laurel in an alien land. For anybody the shock could have been nerve-shattering. But Surendranath was made of sterner stuff. At a time when one tends to get perplexed and confused, he took courage in both hands and moved the Queen's Bench for a writ of *mandamus* upon the Civil Service Commissioners. Surendranath engaged two competent counsels, Mr. Mellish and Mr. John Bell. A distinguished Bench presided over by the Lord Chief Justice of England heard the application. The rule was granted. But even before this memorable legal battle was over, the Civil Service Commissioners recanted and, having realised their mistake, restored the name of Surendranath in the list of candidates selected for the Civil Service.

This was a moment of supreme triumph for Surendranath, who had displayed extraordinary courage, perseverance and *esamina*. This single episode of his early life

showed that he was not a man to take things lying down, that with all his apparent agreeableness he was a tough fighter at heart, one who was destined in later years to be the spearhead of resistance against many a bureaucratic wrong.

Fate was so unkind to Surendranath that this moment of supreme happiness was suddenly converted into one of profound grief for him. The man who would have been the happiest to hear of his success, his father, died in February 1870. The delayed news, reaching him in England about the middle of March, completely overwhelmed him. In his autobiography he refers to his bereavement in words of remarkable self-restraint. But through those brief but poignant words wells up a deep emotion which speaks eloquently of the wonderful tie between a devoted son and a dutiful father.

In his autobiography, Surendranath gives beautiful pen-pictures of his fellow students in England which are of considerable interest, specially in view of the fact that not many Indian students those days could afford to go to England to compete for the Civil Service. For his two friends, R. C. Dutt and B. L. Gupta, Surendranath is full of praise. Both of them shone very much as civil servants in India. R. C. Dutt was not only a civilian but also a litterateur and an economist; he became a President of the Indian National Congress. It was Biharilal Gupta who, as Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta, drew the Government's attention to the gross racial discrimination in the administration of justice—a humiliating anomaly which Lord Ripon sought to set right through the controversial Ilbert Bill. Surendranath also pays a tribute to the intellectual calibre of S. B. Thakur, who became a District Judge in Bombay, and to Anandaram Barua, a candidate from Assam.

Among the professors under whom Surendranath had

the opportunity to study, he refers with affectionate solicitude to Dr. Goldstucker and Henry Morley. The former, a teacher of Sanskrit, was stern like an Indian guru, while the latter was sweet and serene and helped Surendranath during the trouble over his age by persuading Charles Dickens to write a strong article in his journal, *Good Words*.

It was again during his stay in England where, in spite of his being an Indian, he received all courtesy and cordiality from Englishmen, that he came to develop his life-long admiration for the British liberal ideas and constitutional freedom peculiar to English life. Even in the face of strong extremist criticism, unpopularity and political discomfiture later in life, there was no flagging of this early admiration for the British democratic institutions, an admiration that had gone deep into his soul. "To England we look for inspiration and guidance... we have been fed upon the strong food of English constitutional freedom. We have been taught to admire the eloquence and genius of the great masters of English political philosophy".⁶ It was this early tutelage under liberal British thinkers which fashioned his political philosophy beyond the passing winds of change.

A few words about the growth of the Indian Civil Service will not be irrelevant here. It was the one issue which epitomized in itself the early Indian political aspiration. It was the firm belief of the Indian national leaders of those days that the first step to self-government was the increasing share of Indians in the administration, specially in the superior services. On this issue there was a long and bitter struggle between enlightened India on the one hand and the British bureaucracy on the other. For

⁶ *Speeches & Writings*, Surendranath Banerjea

Surendranath it was a painfully personal issue becoming a political one and provided the framework for his early political life.

The Indian Civil Service, the Covenanted Civil Service as it was later called, evolved since the anarchical days of Company misrule painfully slowly through various machinations and manipulations. Lord Cornwallis so completely Europeanised the superior services that even an intellectual giant like Rammohan Roy could only rise to be a Dewan to a Collector. For fifty years from 1806 onwards the products of the Haileybury College manned the Civil Service in India. The system was one of nomination to the College by the Directors and the Board of Control of the Company. in other words a system based on favouritism, nepotism and patronage. The age at nomination was to be sixteen years followed by a two-year term at the College. There was no question of taking in Indians. When it was proposed that Rajaram Roy, Rammohan's foster child, should be nominated, the proposal was turned down by the Directors although he was otherwise qualified for the job. The Charter Act of 1833 embodied the principle of limited competition which was never given effect to. Finally, the Charter Act of 1853 ended the Company's vested interests in nomination and threw the Civil Service open to all natural born subjects of Her Majesty. This principle was reaffirmed by the Queen's Proclamation. The first competition was held in 1855 while the Civil Service Commissioners took charge in 1858.

In this connection one has to recall Macaulay's warm advocacy of open competition to the complete elimination of racial exclusiveness practised by the Company's Directors. Although Macaulay has gone down in Indian history as a detractor of oriental culture, his robust liberalism worked effectively in many of the Civil Service reforms.

The Macaulay Committee recommended 23 as the upper age limit and 18 as the lower for the open competitive examination. But various excuses were found to defeat the purpose of this recommendation. In 1859 the upper age limit was fixed at 22 to enable the candidates to spend a year's probation in England and subsequently the probationary period having been increased by one year more, the upper age limit was correspondingly reduced by the same period. When Surendranath sat for the examination it was 21 years. Obviously for Indians it was extremely difficult to go to England and compete within the age limits fixed. As a result, up to 1869, out of 16 Indian students who competed, only one, namely, S. N. Tagore, was successful.

As if this was not enough to nip the growing Indian aspiration in the bud, Lord Salisbury, Secretary of State, took it into his head that the upper age limit of 21 was on the high side and reduced it still further to 19 in 1876. This, it may be remembered, he did in the face of strong contrary opinions even among British bureaucrats. An analysis of the memoranda submitted on the question showed that out of 101 officers, 5 did not refer to the age limit at all, only 27 would favour a reduction, 36 would like to retain the existing age limits, and 33 recommended raising the higher limit beyond 21.⁷ There was thus no case at all for a reduction in the upper age limit which Lord Salisbury enforced quite arbitrarily and by an executive fiat, thereby blasting what little hope the Indians still had of getting into the coveted service.

To assuage the ruffled Indian feelings, provision was made in the Government of India Act, 1870, for the appointment of Indians to the superior services. Rules

⁷ *The Civil Service in India*, N. C. Ray

framed thereunder took nine years to be passed, bringing into existence the Statutory Civil Service which did not outlive its inauspicious infancy.

Public opinion demanded not only a reasonable age limit but also the simultaneous holding of the examination in both England and India to facilitate entry of Indians into the Service. The first Congress of 1885 made this demand. The second Congress appointed a committee with Dadabhai Naoroji as Chairman and Surendranath Banerjea as a member to go into the question. Its report demanding simultaneous examinations, closure of the Statutory Civil Service and the fixing of the upper and lower age limits at 23 and 19 respectively was accepted by the Congress. The Aitchison Commission rejected the plea for simultaneous examinations but recommended the raising of age limits to 23 and 19. It also recommended the abolition of the Statutory Civil Service.

Throughout his early career Surendranath had fought stoutly for the Indianisation of the services. It was the recurring theme of many of his public speeches, including the two memorable Presidential addresses at Poona and Ahmedabad. But this struggle was a long and strenuous one and the major part of the demand could not be achieved before the Montford Reforms which made large-scale changes in pattern. The Indian demand now oriented itself towards stopping British recruitment altogether on the ground that it was superfluous. No doubt there was strong opposition from the bureaucratic vested interests to the process of Indianisation. The struggle, as already noted, was a long and bitter one. Since the Montford days more urgent political issues had been overshadowing the question; the process was thus completed only with the attainment of independence.

To go back to the main story. Having passed the final

examination of 1871, Surendranath started for India in August that year along with his two friends, R. C. Dutt and B. L. Gupta *via* some European countries. From Bombay he came to Calcutta, breaking journey at Allahabad where, at a public reception, Surendranath delivered a speech. A tragic and tearful home-coming it was at Calcutta where he met his widowed mother who, bereft of her life's partner, had been in a long and lonely wait for her beloved son.

Surendranath's arrival in Calcutta posed a serious social problem for the family. A sea-voyage being then considered a taboo, the orthodox sections of the Hindu community, and specially those belonging to his own Brahmin caste, treated the family as out-caste.

But his return was welcomed by the progressive circles in Calcutta. The success of Surendranath and his two friends simultaneously at the Civil Service examination was looked upon as a great triumph. This was the second successful batch following Satyendranath Tagore's success in the attempt several years back. An enthusiastic reception was arranged in their honour. Among the participants were such eminent personalities as Keshabchandra Sen and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar. The occasion was celebrated as one of great jubilation not only for Bengal but for the whole of India. Indeed the whole of India felt the thrilling impact of this success. A most closely guarded preserve of the ruling race had been successfully stormed for the second time in history.

Sylhet, then a part of Bengal and later of Assam, was the place where Surendranath was posted as Assistant Magistrate under an Anglo-Indian Magistrate, H. C. Sutherland. All went well for a time. Then came the most stunning blow fate had kept in reserve for him. Posford, a *pucca* Englishman and senior to Surendranath as Assistant Magis-

trate by two years, failed in the departmental examination while Surendranath, an Indian, who had darc'd into the charmed cadre, passed. This led to local gossip and official jealousies. Sutherland felt scandalized that an Indian should have passed while an Englishman should not have. An atmosphere of cold war thus started between Surendranath and the European Magistracy. Sutherland was angry also because Surendranath was friendly with Anderson, the Joint Magistrate, with whom Sutherland was not friendly.

Bipinchandra Pal, who hailed from the place where Surendranath had his posting, recalls how Surendranath visited the school where he was a student and how Mrs. Banerjea was seen riding a pony in flowing skirts.⁸ Sutherland, Pal recalls, was a man with "sagacious and heavy form", who initially befriended Surendranath but refused to admit him to the European civilian society on equal terms. Surendranath, however, was not a man to yield to this racial arrogance and behaved with his innate spirit of independence. It is said that on one occasion at the race course Surendranath's wife demanded a seat on the same gallery with the wives of the European officers.⁹ The latter started nursing crude jealousies against him. Sutherland was supposed even to have encouraged spies to carry tales about Surendranath to him.

Fate so ordained that an opportunity came soon enough for them to feed fat their racial grudge. A theft case in which one Yudhisthir was the accused had come to Surendranath's court but could not be disposed of due to heavy pressure of work. An order however was passed on it under Surendranath's initials declaring the man a *ferari*, while actually he was not so. For this technical mistake Surendra-

⁸ *My Life and Times, 1857—1884*

⁹ *Rashtraguru Surendranath* (In Bengali). Moni Bagchi

nath was not very much responsible. In order to explain away the long pendency of the case, the *peskar* had got the order passed by him, since customarily junior officers had to depend very much upon the *peskars*. Obviously Surendranath had passed the order unknowingly and without understanding its significance.

The Magistrate, Mr. Sutherland, now had his opportunity. Ordinarily the young guilty officer would perhaps have been let off with a warning. But in the present case Surendranath's explanation was called for and not accepted. Through the District Judge the matter reached the High Court and ultimately the Government appointed an all-European Commission of Enquiry. The Commissioners found him guilty of dishonesty and of giving a false explanation. This led ultimately to the extreme punishment of dismissal from the service with a compassionate allowance of Rs. 50 per month. All this sounds like a strange tale at this distance of time but then this is exactly what happened in the life of Surendranath. Many years later several disinterested European officers, including two Lieutenant-Governors of Bengal, conceded that it was a wicked proceeding and that a grievous wrong had been done to young Surendranath. This is also evident from the fact that within eight years of his dismissal from the Civil Service he was to be appointed by the selfsame Government as an Honorary Presidency Magistrate and Justice of the Peace.

A man of indomitable spirit, Surendranath refused to take it lying down and proceeded to England to plead his case before the India Office. But he found the authorities there absolutely cold. Within a few weeks, he was officially informed of his dismissal from the Indian Civil Service. One chapter of his life was thus closed in apparent ignominy. A hard battle had been fought by Surendranath for a full year and lost. He took the order of dismissal, not quite unantic-

pated, as a "real relief" from this agonising experience. He now knew where he stood. Despondency was not in his grain. Of adversity he had already had enough and more was yet to come. But through the series of adversities, the human spirit that admits no defeat shone brightly. He girded himself once again to fight the hard battle of life. Having anticipated events he had already been keeping terms at the Middle Temple for qualifying himself for the Bar; but when the time came for his being called to the Bar in the summer of 1875, the Benchers refused to call him because of his earlier dismissal from the Civil Service. He was thus shut out from the Civil Service as well as from the Bar! Thus were closed to him "all avenues to the realisation of an honourable ambition".

In this hour of the darkest crisis, when he was given up by all friends for a lost man, dawned on him the realisation about his life's mission. It was not only a personal decision but one of crucial importance for his country. The decision can best be put in his own words :

"In the iron grip of ruin I had already formed some forecast of the work that was awaiting me in life. I felt that I had suffered because I was an Indian a member of a community that lay disorganised, had no public opinion, and no voice in the counsels of their Government. I felt with all the passionate warmth of youth that we were helots, hewers of wood and drawers of water in the land of our birth. The personal wrong done to me was an illustration of the helpless impotency of our people. Were others to suffer in the future as I had suffered in the past? They *must*, I thought to myself, unless we were capable as a community of redressing our wrongs and protecting our rights, personal and collective. In the midst of impending ruin and dark, frowning misfortune, I formed the determination of address-

ing myself to the task of helping our helpless people in that direction."¹⁰

With this end in view, he devoted most of the period of his stay in England between April 1874 and April 1875 to a diligent study of the great masters of English literature and history and such other studies as would inspire and qualify him for this great task. This is how he felt about this period of his life :

"It was a year of preparation, of laborious apprenticeship (from April 1874, to April 1875) that was most valuable in my life, and upon which I look back with infinite pleasure. The gloom that surrounded me was dispelled in the new vision that opened out to me in the prospective glories of a dedicated life of unselfish devotion in the service of my fallen country. It was a period of incessant work led by an invisible inspiration. I recovered my buoyancy in the new hope that was awakened in me, and the joy that thrilled me, that all was not lost, but that there was still work to be done by me, perhaps even in a higher sphere than before. Out of death cometh life, a higher life and a nobler resurrection."¹⁰

Returning home in June 1875. Surendranath was received by his wife with a bright and cheery countenance. A word about this noble lady, Chandi Debi, will be pertinent here. Though not educated in the formal sense of the term, she possessed in an extraordinary measure the sterling qualities of love, sympathy and courage. Even in the midst of grave crises, she did not cower but always stood firmly by her husband with her confidence unshaken.

Surendranath's dismissal from service has been described as a historic turning point in the life of the nation. "A fortunate chance", to quote Dr. Sitaramayya. The country

lost a good civilian but gained a great leader. The utter iniquity underlying the whole episode gave a rude shock to educated India's faith in British professions of liberalism and justice and created countrywide resentment. But perhaps it was a shock therapy the country was in need of at that moment. With his dismissal the decks were now cleared for Surendranath's emergence on the public scene as one of the makers of the country's modern history. Soon after his return to Calcutta in June 1875, Surendranath made his first public speech at a largely attended Calcutta temperance meeting, which earned him immediate recognition as a public speaker of great promise.

CHAPTER IV

TEACHING AND WORKING AMONG YOUTH

Surendranath was soon offered an appointment as Professor of English in the Metropolitan Institution by the great Pandit Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, which he accepted. The salary of Rs. 200 a month was by no means big for him but he was glad that he had an occupation and at the same time an opportunity to come into contact with the young. "I sought by every possible means in my power to kindle in the young the beginnings of public spirit, and to inspire them with a patriotic ardour, fruitful of good to them and to the motherland."¹¹

Thus began one phase of his life : teaching. Indeed his life had three main aspects, teaching, journalism and politics. His later role as a political leader should not however, blind us to his eminence in his first profession, teaching, a profession he held in high esteem, higher than even politics. While still on the staff of Vidyasagar's Metropolitan Institution, Surendranath also joined the tutorial staff of the City School (later City College), an institution of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj, many of whose members were his close associates. So keen was his passion for public work, for which the teaching profession afforded in those days almost an unlimited scope, that he refused the offer of English Secretaryship under the Tripura Raj on a salary of Rs. 700 a month. His total income at that time was only Rs. 300 a month, with no prospect of any substantial increase. In March 1880, Surendranath left the Metropolitan Institution and one month later joined the

¹¹ *A Nation in Making*

Free Church College (now Scottish Church College) as Professor of English Literature.

Later still, in 1882, he took over charge of a school teaching up to the Matriculation standard, named Presidency Institution, and nursed it up with almost paternal care. The institution grew into a first grade degree college teaching upto the B.A., B.Sc. and B.L. standards of the Calcutta University, with a school attached to it. It was called Ripon College and has now been named after Surendranath himself to honour the memory of its great founder. In 1885 Surendranath resigned from the Free Church College owing to the growing demands on his time and attention of the institution that he himself had founded.

For thirtyseven years, from 1875 to 1912, Surendranath was engaged in active teaching work, inspiring several generations of students with his magnificent erudition and oratory and making student life in Bengal instinct with a deep sense of national purpose. His love for the students was unbounded. "I love the students" was his slogan. He was an educationist to the core of his being and took to teaching work with a missionary zeal. Political work, he felt, was more or less ephemeral, while educational work had in it the elements of permanent utility. Students were fired by his eloquence and neo-idealism. As long as he was at Ripon College, the institution became a rallying point of students hungry for his eloquence on Burke and Macaulay, and a pilgrim centre for initiation into the new and inspiring gospel of nationalism. A word must be said here about the famous Students' Association which was established in Calcutta by Anandamohan Bose who was senior to Surendranath by one year. A brilliant student of the Calcutta University, the first Indian wrangler at Cambridge and a rising practitioner at the Calcutta Bar, Anandamohan too had thrown himself heart and soul into

the public movements of the day. Surendranath joined him in organising the Students' Association. The combination of the idealism of Anandamohan and the pragmatism of Surendranath gave birth to a dynamic leadership in Bengal.

In the context of the current student turmoil, it is interesting to recall Surendranath's views on students and politics. He was undoubtedly one of those who helped implant the beginnings of political consciousness among the students late in the 19th century. He was convinced that "the political advancement of the country must depend upon the creation among our young men of a genuine, sober and rational interest in public affairs".¹² At the same time he did not like the students to cherish extreme fanatical views; he thought this was fraught with danger. It was Keshabchandra Sen who had stirred the youthful mind out of the contemporary inertia by his doctrine of freedom and equality in the socio-religious sphere, but Surendranath came with a new message and a new appeal. And that was in the sphere of politics. At a time when politics was a mere intellectual pastime he made a deep impression upon the student mind. From his thorough study of European freedom movements Surendranath knew the role the students could play in such movements. Inspired by Mazzini and the Italian freedom movements, he roused in the student mind a deep patriotic fervour. Indeed, he wanted new Mazzinis and Garibaldis to emerge from among India's rising generations to forge unity and achieve political freedom. At one stage, with the help of Jogendra Nath Vidyabhushan, he got the lives of Mazzini and Garibaldi published in Bengali.

The subjects he often chose for his lectures were : Indian unity, Sikh history, life of Mazzini, life of Chaitanya, the

¹² *A Nation in Making*

study of history and so on. He brought out the valour of the Sikhs, of their fight for freedom and deathless devotion to their cause—facts glossed over in books written by British historians. He reinterpreted Chaitanya as a prophet of a new socio-religious faith and removed the stigma then attaching to Vaishnavism. In a speech on Indian unity he pleaded passionately that as in the case of Switzerland, Italy and other countries, linguistic and other differences should not stand in the way of the unification of India. The stage, he felt, had been set for such a unity by the introduction of a common all-India language, namely, English, the establishment of all-India communications and the growth of a powerful indigenous Press. He said : "Let us raise aloft the banner of our country's progress. Let the word unity be inscribed there in characters of glittering gold... There may be religious differences between us. There may be social differences between us. But there is a common platform where we may all meet, the platform of our country's welfare... There is a common Divinity to whom we may uplift our voices in adoration, the Divinity who presides over the destiny of our country. In the name then of a common country let us all Hindus, Musalmans, Christians, Parsees, members of the great Indian community, throw the pall of oblivion over the jealousies and dissensions of by-gone times... and live and work for the benefit of a beloved fatherland.... Let us all lead worthy, honourable and patriotic lives. . that India may be great".¹³ The concept of one united India comprising its bewildering diversities of races, religions and cultures being welded into one nationality, a secular India where religion would be no bar to unity and equality, dawned upon him as early as the eighteen seventies, long before the Congress set about to

¹³ *Speeches*, edited by R. C. Palit

give it a concrete shape. The "Common Divinity" to whom he referred in the speech quoted above remains enshrined in Tagore's immortal adoration of "Bharata Bhagya Bidhata" in our national anthem.

CHAPTER V

INDIAN UNITY

The time had clearly come for doing something concrete to harness the growing consciousness of the educated middle class to really useful purposes. Possibly the first political association which aimed at the welfare of the inhabitants of all the British territories in India was the Bengal British India Society founded in 1843. Later, in 1851, came the British Indian Association on the eve of the revision of the Company's Charter in 1853. The Association decided to submit a general petition formulating Indian demands and representing perhaps the first political aspirations of a waking nation. In the fifties the Association was quite active. But after the Revolt of 1857 the situation started changing considerably, and the stage was being set for a new type and technique of political agitation.

The British Indian Association, "under the guidance of the great Kristodas Pal, who was the Secretary, valiantly upheld the popular interests when necessary; but it was essentially and by its creed an Association of land-holders. Nor did an active political agitation, or the creation of public opinion by direct appeals to the people, form a part of its recognised programme. There was thus the clear need for another political Association on a more democratic basis, and the fact was indeed recognised by the leaders of the British Indian Association."¹⁴

The birth of the Indian Association, with which Surendranath was closely associated, was a significant event

¹⁴ *A Nation in Making*, Surendranath Banerjea

in the direction. The Indian League started by Sisir Kumar Ghosh, editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, slightly preceded the Indian Association and did some useful work in the field until the Indian Association came to occupy the centre of the stage. Surendranath was "the moving spirit of the new body".¹⁵ Anandamohan Bose and Dwarakanath Ganguli were close associates of Surendranath in this new endeavour. The Indian Association was established on July 26, 1876. In view of his dismissal from Government service, Surendranath, however, kept himself in the background and held no office. The naming of the Association itself was of great significance. Instead of giving it a provincial label, the sponsors decided to call it 'Indian' with a view to making it represent all-India interests and to foster all-India unity. At a time when public life in the different provinces was confined by and large within a narrow parochial ken, this was a bold step, and Surendranath's wise forethought was unmistakably behind it. Surendranath himself says in his autobiography how, under inspiration derived from Mazzini, "the conception of a united India" had taken firm possession of the mind of Bengal. The inaugural meeting of the Association was attended by Surendranath under the shadow of a great personal bereavement; he had lost his son the same morning. But personal grief was nothing to him where public questions were concerned. And this was not the first occasion when he put the public cause much above the personal.

It is interesting to note here that some time before the establishment of the Indian Association, Pandit Ishwar-chandra Vidyasagar and Justice Dwarakanath Mitra, while still a member of the bar, had thought of organising a similar association, to be named the Bengal Association, which

¹⁵ *History of the Congress, 1885-1935*, Dr. Sitaramayya

was to be the organ of the middle classes. The idea at that time did not gain sufficient support and as such had to be given up.

The ideals which Surendranath had set before himself in organising the Indian Association were : (1) creation of a strong body of public opinion, (2) unification of the Indian races and peoples on the basis of common political interests and aspirations; (3) promotion of friendly feelings between Hindus and Muslims; and (4) enlisting the masses in the public movements of the day.

Soon after its birth the Indian Association was called upon to face a big challenge. Lord Salisbury, who was then Secretary of State for India, had reduced the maximum age limit for Civil Service from 21 to 19, thereby blasting what little chance Indians had for competing therein. This arbitrary action, a gross and calculated assault on Indian aspirations, created widespread resentment in this country. The Association took up the challenge as it was expected to do. At a public meeting held in Calcutta on March 24, 1877, it was decided to appeal to the whole of India and to unite the different provinces on a common platform on the issue of the Civil Service—something which had never been attempted before. The demands were: the raising of the maximum age limit and the holding of simultaneous examinations in India and England. Exactly the same demands were to be voiced by the first Indian National Congress some eight years later. The Civil Service question thus became the first major policy plank in India's political struggle. Like other leaders of the day, Surendranath too believed that the Civil Service issue was inseparably bound up with the idea of the realisation of progressive self-government for Indians.

At the Calcutta meeting sponsored by the Indian Association, Surendranath was appointed Special Delegate to

tour Northern India and mobilise public opinion in support of the Civil Service demands, set forth in a memorial. At a time when communications were by no means easy and journey by no means comfortable, the idea of establishing personal contact with the different parts of the country with a view to mobilising them had dawned upon Surendranath and his colleagues. A shining precedent had, however, been created by the Brahmo leader, Keshabchandra Sen, who had toured both Northern and Southern India about a decade before, preaching the message of the fundamental spiritual unity of India; it was now Surendranath's turn to preach the message of political unity in the secular sphere. Accompanied by Nagendra Nath Chatterjee, an important member of the Association, he set out on his tour of North India and Punjab in May 1877, defying the terrific summer heat. His tour was a remarkable success in consolidating the nascent sense of Indian nationhood. He visited a large number of places including Lahore, Amritsar, Kanpur, Aligarh and Agra. Political associations on the line of the Indian Association sprang up in several of these places in the wake of his tour. In many of them the Civil Service resolution and the memorial drawn up at Calcutta were adopted. A great sense of reawakening was created by Surendranath's tour. In Punjab, he established a warm friendship with Sardar Dayal Singh Majeethia and helped him start his renowned newspaper, *The Tribune*. He also came in contact with other North Indian leaders like Pandit Ayodhyanath, Pandit Vishvambhar Nath, Babu Harish Chandra, Sir Syed Ahmed and many others. He came to have the warmest relationship with Sir Syed Ahmed who presided over the Civil Service meeting at Aligarh. Later Sir Syed had differences of opinion with the Congress. Nevertheless in his autobiography, Surendranath pays him a high tribute and says that both the Hindus and the Muslims owe a

debt of gratitude to his honoured memory. Surendranath's North Indian tour was a resounding success. Wherever he went, he was received with the utmost cordiality, and he found among the educated classes a growing political consciousness and a warm, sympathetic response to the Civil Service call. The Indian languages Press gave it wide publicity, and the Calcutta memorial, accepted in all these places, was translated into Urdu. Surendranath held up the Civil Service issue as "a national question" and tried to rally national consciousness around it. In Northern India he found "a deep but hidden under-current of political feeling"; it was waiting to be suitably harnessed. That welding force he was trying to infuse into the public life, bringing the scattered provinces together, thus to effect an Indian regeneration. Enlightened Muslims flocked to his meetings in large numbers, and sympathised with the cause.

The remarkable success of his Northern India tour encouraged his colleagues to depute him on a similar mission to the South and West of the country. (There are two dates of the visit known. According to J. C. Bagal, it was in the winter of 1877.¹⁶ But Surendranath gives the winter of 1878 as the time of the visit.) In Bombay, he met the leaders of thought like V. Mandlik, K. T. Telang and Phiroze Shah Mehta. The Civil Service resolutions and memorial were adopted in substance at a public meeting. After touring Surat and Ahmedabad, he reached Poona where he was the guest of Ranade. Madras, where he met Dr. Dhanakatu Raju, Chentsal Rao and Humayun Jah Bahadur, was as yet not very politically instinct. Here the Civil Service resolutions were adopted not at a public meeting, as elsewhere, but at a conference of leaders.

Surendranath's all-India tours were perhaps the first con-

¹⁶ *History of the Indian Association*

seious attempt at forging an all-India unity on the political plane, and the Civil Service question provided the most appropriate rallying call of the moment. These tours were a remarkable success. Everywhere he met with the warmest response: he found growing politieal consciousness striving for voice and expression. He says : "For the first time under British rule, India with its varied races and religions had been brought upon the same platform for a common and united effort. Thus was it demonstrated... that whatever might be our differences in respect of race and language or soeial and religious institutions, the people of India could combine and unite for the attainment of their common politieal ends...the ground was thus prepared for this great national and unifying movement (Congress movement)".¹⁷ Sir Henry Cotton remarked that "at the present moment the name of Surendranath Banerjea excites as much enthusiasm among the rising generation of Multan as in Dacca".¹⁸ It has been aptly said that the seed of the later Congress consolidation was sown by Surendranath during these tours. The agitation "can be considered the beginning of the whole subsequent movement for Swaraj".¹⁹ This idea of common fellowship was reflected through the increasing intercourse among provincial leaders. For instance, the leaders of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha paid a return visit to Caleutta in 1878. So did Sardar Dayal Singh Majeethia.

The next step the Indian Association took was to depute Lalmohan Ghosh, a Caleutta Barrister, to England to present the all-India Civil Service Memorial to Parliament. The choice originally fell upon Surendranath but he deliberately stepped aside in favour of Lalmohan because he felt

¹⁷ *A Nation in Making*

¹⁸ *New India*

¹⁹ *Renaescent India*, Zacharias

that his own unhappy Civil Service background might prejudice the cause. Surendrānath, however, took a leading part in raising donations for sending Lalmohan overseas. Lalmohan's wonderful eloquence moved public opinion in England; at a meeting presided over by John Bright, Ghosh spoke with great power and eloquence. This had its desired effect; the rules creating the Statutory Civil Service were at last tabled in the House of Commons after seven years of dilly-dallying. Although the Statutory Civil Service fell far short of Indian expectations, yet a good deal was achieved. After all the Government had been moved. The experience opened up new and hitherto unthought of possibilities of agitation in England on India's behalf. It also brought out the potentiality of constitutional agitation and thus encouraged hope for the future. It should be noted that the idea of sending a delegation to England over the Civil Service issue had occurred to Surendranath during his all-India tours, and he had impressed it upon the Indian Association. Already India's two unofficial cultural ambassadors, Rammohan Roy and Keshabchandra Sen, had gone to England, each on his own mission, and raised India high in the estimation of the British public. In this connection mention must also be made of the efforts Dadabhai Naoroji had been making to acquaint the British public with the real state of affairs prevailing in India, to rouse intelligent British interest in Indian affairs, and to champion the cause of India from the English soil itself. Like Dadabhai, Surendranath also believed that if British ignorance about India could be removed and the cobwebs of misunderstanding cleared, there was bound to be political gain for India.

CHAPTER VI

THE FERMENT GROWS

The Conservative Government of England sent to India Lord Lytton (1876-1880) who, despite many brilliances, was a very unpopular Viceroy and whose regime was one of the most reactionary in many ways. Lord Salisbury had, to quote Zacharias, "the melancholy distinction"²⁰ of sending out two Viceroys who had done much harm to India and England in India—Lord Lytton and Lord Curzon. The ill-conceived Afghan campaign earned Lord Lytton an undying disrepute in history: the Vernacular Press Act and the Arms Act made him justly infamous. But in a way Lord Lytton's misrule was a blessing in disguise. It roused the people's indignation to fever heat and whetted the sense of nationalism which had just started crystallising all over the country. Surendranath has put this in the following words: "In the evolution of political progress bad rulers are often a blessing in disguise... Lord Lytton was a benefactor without intending to be one and more recently Lord Curzon was a benefactor in the same sense but perhaps on a larger scale".²¹

One of the most unpopular acts of Lord Lytton's Government was the grand Delhi Durbar of 1877 in connection with formal proclamation of Queen Victoria as the Empress of India. This costly show was arranged at a time when large parts of the country were in the grip of a terrible famine. One novel feature, however, was that the

²⁰ *Renaissance India*. Zacharias

²¹ *A Nation in Making*

Press was invited to it. Surendranath had earlier, in 1874-75, served as the London correspondent of the *Hindoo Patriot*, one of the most influential papers of those days. Present at the Delhi Durbar on behalf of the same paper, Surendranath organised a Press Association consisting of the representatives of the Indian Press and led a delegation to the Viceroy, Lord Lytton. In an address presented to him, he referred to the reports about possible restrictions being clamped down on the Press and urged that the liberties enjoyed by the newspapers till then might be allowed to continue. This address apparently had no effect upon the Viceroy, as we shall presently see. But in other ways there was a definite gain. The solidarity of the Indian Press, then and ever since a part and parcel of the Indian struggle, was displayed beyond a shadow of doubt. Secondly, the Durbar, however wasteful and unseemly otherwise, helped leading men from all over India to come together. This suggested a common ground for constitutional agitation. In that sense, it was an important step in the evolution of Indian nationhood and the idea of a common struggle. "The idea of united India thus emerged as an unconscious by-product of the Durbar".²² But perhaps it was not entirely unconscious. Dr. Sitaramayya records the belief that the idea of organising a vast political gathering occurred to Surendranath under inspiration from the Delhi assemblage of Princes and people.²³

The Arms Act and the Vernacular Press Act provoked widespread public agitation in which Surendranath played a conspicuous part. The Arms Act was not only unnecessary but also mischievous in that it put on the Indians a badge of racial inferiority and made an invidious distinction between Indians and Europeans. Worst of all, it aimed

²² *Rise and Growth of Indian Liberalism*, M.A. Buch

²³ *The History of the Congress*

at the emasculation of the Indian people. The motivated mistrust inherent in the Act is brought out by B. C. Pal in the following words : "The Hottentot and the Zulu could carry arms while walking along the streets of Calcutta or Bombay but the native Indian subject of the British Government could not do so".²⁴

Similarly the Vernacular Press Act also, which was passed at one and the same sitting of the Imperial Legislative Council early in 1878, was conceived in mistrust and applied in malice. The vernacular Press all over India except Madras was muzzled. The Act gave the Executive wide and arbitrary powers of stifling the Press. It was a drastic Act. It only showed the bureaucracy's intolerance of—and also fear for—the growing criticism of the administration in the vernacular Press, particularly in Bengal. In 1875 there were about 475 newspapers in India, mostly in the Indian languages. Happily public opinion in the country did not take the challenge lying down. The agitation that ensued was tremendous. Under the auspices of the Indian Association, a big public meeting was held in Calcutta where resolutions were adopted opposing the Vernacular Press Act. The meeting also decided to send a memorial to Parliament. In holding the meeting the organisers had sought the opinions of leaders and political associations all over the country. The memorial was presented to the House of Commons by Mr. Gladstone, then Leader of the Opposition, in July 1878, who also moved a resolution on the Act. Speakers from the Opposition benches strongly criticised the reactionary measure. Although the resolution was defeated, it gave an opportunity to the British public to be apprised of the reactionary rule in India. In effect it paved the way for the subsequent repeal of the Vernacular Press Act. The defeat was a

²⁴ *Memoirs of My Life and Time, 1857-1884*

triumph in essence, triumph not only for the Indian Association but for Surendranath personally.

In the general election that followed the dissolution of the British Parliament in 1880, India figured very prominently. The Indian Association deputed Lalinohan Ghosh to England to acquaint the British electors with the situation in India. In the election campaign, in which men like Gladstone and Bright participated, India became a major issue, and the Conservative highhandedness in this country made not a little for the defeat of that party. As Liberal Prime Minister, Gladstone sent out Lord Ripon (1880 to 1884) to India as Viceroy to the great relief of the Indian people. The Liberal victory in England coupled with the beneficent measures of Lord Ripon strengthened the still surviving Indian faith in British justice and constitutional agitation. It seemed to usher in, for a time at least, an era of promise and aided the cause of liberalism in India. R. C. Dutt has tried to show that "... the history of progress in England and the history of progress in India have flowed in parallel streams".²⁵

The first thing Lord Ripon did was to remove the thorn in the Indians' flesh in the shape of the Vernacular Press Act. This was widely acclaimed. Lord Lytton's high-handed assault on Indians' right to free expression was thus undone and the latter's ruffled feelings assuaged to an extent. Lord Ripon had gone on record as saying that "the official in India regards the Press as an evil, necessary perhaps, but to be kept within as narrow limits as possible".²⁶ Then came the famous resolution on local self-government—another cause dear to Surendranath's heart. Like Dadabhai, Surendranath also believed that local self-government was only a step to national self-government. In

²⁵ *India and England*

²⁶ *British Rule in India and After*, V. D. Mahajan

this connection Surendranath undertook tours of the mofussil areas of Bengal to mobilise public opinion for the purpose of reorganising the municipalities on an elective basis. Armed with a broad basis of public opinion, he and his colleagues convened a public meeting where he moved a resolution on local self-government recommending among other things the constitution of local bodies on an elective basis with an elected Chairman. This formed the very basic principle of the Government of India resolution passed later.

Important as it was, local self-government was not enough. The Bengal leaders had by that time started thinking in terms of representative government. The movement initiated in western India by men like Dadabhai Naoroji and in eastern India by the leaders of the Indian Association was beginning to be oriented towards a large horizon. A strange and unprecedented kind of awakening had been stirring educated people not only in Bengal but in the rest of India. Lord Ripon was a true liberal, a man who stood firmly by his own faith, and one who really loved peace and self-government. He sympathised with the Indian aspirations and wanted the Indian people to take their first lesson in democracy. His regime remains one of the most memorable in the history of British rule in India.

The next push forward in the progress of Indian nationalism may be said to have been provided by the ugly and boisterous agitation started by the Europeans in India over the Ilbert Bill, another beneficent measure by which Lord Ripon wanted to do away with racial discrimination in the dispensation of justice. Under the then existing law, Indian civilians were debarred from trying Europeans on criminal charges except in presidency towns—a humiliating distinction to which the Government's attention was first

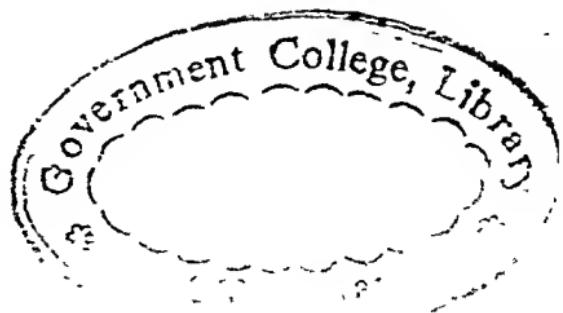
drawn by B. L. Gupta, Surendranath's friend and then Chief Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta. The European and Anglo-Indian community rose as one man against Lord Ripon's effort to remove this blot on the administration of justice. A big public meeting was held by them in Calcutta, a defence association was formed with branches in different parts of the country, and a defence fund of one and a half lakh rupees was created. Lord Ripon was openly insulted and abused, and there was even a conspiracy to deport the Viceroy. A correspondent wrote in the *Englishman* : "The only people who had any right in India are the British. The so-called Indians have no right whatever".²⁷ The European and Anglo-Indian agitation failed to demean Lord Ripon in Indian estimation; indeed their reckless action only made him more estimable. He was literally idolized by the Indian people. Simultaneously, the Ilbert Bill agitation had a tremendous effect on the Indian struggle. It was an insult to India's sense of national pride and prestige. "No educated Indian has ever forgotten the lessons of the Ilbert Bill".²⁸ It helped consolidate the feeling of unity among the Indian people and brought home to them the power and effectiveness of the combined opposition as demonstrated by the Europeans and the Anglo-Indians. In western India Dadabhai Naoroji sponsored a public meeting to support the Ilbert Bill. Yet another public meeting was held in Bombay as a counterblast to the European meeting at Calcutta.

The raising of a public fund for political purposes also was not without its effect upon the Indians. It encouraged the leaders to start an agitation for raising a national fund for constitutional agitation in India and England. Needless

²⁷ *British Rule in India and After*, V. D. Mahajan

²⁸ *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India*, Thompson & Garrett

to say. Surendranath took a leading part in this campaign. The Ilbert Bill agitation, says Zacharias, "was a decisive Act which let loose the national avalanche and which led Banerjea to launch in 1883 a parallel all-India movement for the creation of a national fund".²⁹



CHAPTER VII

PATRIOT WITH THE PEN

Surendranath's versatility is evident from the fact that he was a teacher, a political leader and a journalist, all rolled into one. Basically a teacher and reformer, he wanted to mould public opinion according to his lights. This he sought to do through the different media at his disposal—his class room, the public platform and his powerful pen.

Journalism in India developed as part of the process of the growth of public opinion, becoming in this way a part of the freedom struggle itself. The more articulate and more virile the public opinion became, the more pressing was the need of an organ of expression. Since the beginning of the newspaper press in India, there had been frequent conflicts, often bitter, between the administration and the press. The latter had to struggle through various restrictions imposed upon it from time to time. This happened right from the days of Warren Hastings, whose quarrels with Hicky, the founder of the *Calcutta Gazette*, are well-known. Initially it was the English-owned press which bore the brunt of official wrath. But later this unavoidable distinction went to the Indian-owned newspapers which established themselves in the country's political life and became a force to reckon with.

Surendranath made his *debut* into the field of journalism by purchasing the *Bengalee* newspaper and press. Since the Indian Association could not afford to run the paper, a losing concern, Surendranath himself became its proprietor-editor from January 1879. He had no business

motive; his only purpose in acquiring the paper was to serve the ends with which he had identified himself. It was, like all other Bengal newspapers of those days except the *Indian Mirror*, a weekly paper, appearing every Saturday. The daily press is a comparatively recent phenomenon. The news hunger, which only the dailies could satisfy, had not yet grown. Surendranath refers to an interesting talk he had on the subject with a headmaster, a man of education and culture. The headmaster told him that since he took a full week to go through the *Bengalee*, then a weekly, he would not know what to do with it if it were to be a daily paper.

The appearance of the *Bengalee* was a very important event. Through it Surendranath set a new pattern of independent journalism. In February 1900, he converted his paper into a daily and it functioned vigorously until he gave up its editorship with his assumption of office as a Minister in 1921. The *Bengalee* had the distinction of being the first Indian newspaper to have subscribed to the Reuters news service when it became a daily. The paper was conducted from the nationalist standpoint and carried on a ceaseless battle against official encroachments on the liberties of the people. Dr. Sachindananda Sinha says: "As a journalist Surendranath edited the *Bengalee* for over four long decades which witnessed the fusion of diverse elements in Indian politics into one homogenous and compact national party. As editor he exalted his office, position and dignity. His attitude towards antagonists was scrupulously fair and he never lapsed into a petty provincial groove".²⁰ Speaking of the later role of the *Bengalee*, Margarita Barnes says: "Indian opinion found expression in the columns of the *Bengalee*, edited by the talented Suren-

dranath Banerjea who is remembered for, amongst other things, his vigorous campaign against the Partition of Bengal".³¹ Indeed the *Bengalee* may be said to have become an organ of Indian national opinion.

One of the most memorable events of Surendranath's life as a journalist, which incidentally had also had a tremendous effect upon the growing political consciousness, was the notorious contempt case of 1883 and his consequent imprisonment. It so happened that Justice Norris of the Calcutta High Court had ordered the parties to a particular case to produce a *Saligramsil*, the Hindu idol, in his court to facilitate a decision thereon. This was an unprecedented action on the part of a Judge, since an idol was regarded as far too sacred to be produced as an exhibit in a court of law. The incident was reported in a journal called the *Brahmo Public Opinion* and severely commented upon in a leaderette appearing in the *Bengalee* on April 2, 1883. Mr. Norris was described in the editorial as unworthy of the high office of a judge of the highest court in the land. Immediately Surendranath was hauled up on a charge of contempt of court. On the advice of W. C. Banerjee, Surendranath apologised and withdrew the remarks reflecting on Mr. Norris, written in a moment of heat and righteous indignation. But he was not spared. A full bench consisting of five judges sentenced Surendranath by a majority judgment to two months' simple imprisonment. Justice Rameshchandra Mitra, however, dissented from the majority judgment and recommended a fine only. It is said that the Chief Justice had persuaded him a good deal to fall in line with the majority, but he refused to do so. Incidentally, Mr. Mitra was the Judge whom Lord Ripon later elevated to the position of officiating Chief Justice

³¹ *Indian Press*, Margarita Barnes

and thereby incurred the displeasure of the European community.

The court room, which was packed to capacity, became a scene of high tension and angry excitement leading to demonstration and even rowdyism after the sentence had been pronounced. Surendranath was lodged in the Presidency Jail from May 5, 1883. to July 4, 1883.

Public opinion was shocked beyond measure at the severity of the sentence awarded to the popular leader in spite of the apology tendered by him. This touched off a tremendous agitation all over India, and particularly in Bengal, making his imprisonment, as a writer has described it, "an epoch-making event in the history of our freedom movement".²² Protest meetings were held in many places—Lahore, Amritsar, Agra, Poona and so on. Surendranath, whose name was already lovingly familiar all over India, now became a hero and a martyr. The incident acted as a unifying influence. Anandamohan Bose, then Secretary of the Indian Association, reporting on the incident said : "... Babu Surendranath Banerjea had at least one consolation, that his misfortune awakened in a most marked form a manifestation of that sense of unity among the different Indian races for the accomplishment of which he has so earnestly striven, and not in vain".²³ In Calcutta there was a spontaneous *hartal*, the students went into mourning and the demonstrations were mammoth by the standards of those days. Even the British-owned *Statesman* wrote strongly against the sentence. It is said that Robert Knight, then editor of the *Statesman*, used to escort Surendranath's wife to meet her husband in jail. It was a commendable spirit of courage and uprightness

²² *History of Indian Association*, J. C. Bagal

²³ *Ibid*

which Knight had shown. Surendranath was thus one of the two Indians of his generation to have suffered imprisonment for a public cause, the other being Tilak in 1882.

Surendranath was treated as a first class prisoner and allowed various amenities and comforts in jail. He even wrote for the *Bengalee* from there. He was released on July 4, 1883, and he proudly refers in his autobiography to the day being the anniversary of the declaration of American independence. As the day of his release drew near, there was nervousness in the official circles. They feared that the tremendous mass ovation which awaited him outside the prison gate might pose a law and order problem. By a clever stratagem, he was roused from his sleep at 4 a.m., put in a hackney carriage and dropped at the *Bengalee* office before day-break.

It was a period of great excitement and expectation. The Civil Service agitation had brought out the essential oneness of the aims and aspirations of all India. A conscious urge for national unity and consolidation had manifested itself in firm and unmistakable terms. The Ilbert Bill agitation had helped intensify that urge. The ugly and vociferous resistance put up by the Europeans created a rankling sense of national humiliation in the minds of the Indians; at the same time, it offered them an object lesson by proving to demonstration how combined agitation could become effective. Above all, Surendranath's imprisonment shocked the country into a deeper sense of national cohesion. Educated India was undergoing a quick psychological transformation. The formation of an all-India organisation like the Indian National Congress was the next logical step.

On his release from jail, Surendranath threw himself heart and soul into the movement for the creation of a national fund on the analogy of the European defence fund

referred to earlier. At a public meeting held in Calcutta on July 17, 1883, attended by over ten thousand people, it was resolved to create a national fund for constitutional agitation in India and England. Surendranath became one of the trustees of the fund which drew spontaneous contributions from the rich and the poor alike. It is said that two Englishmen, W. S. Blunt and S. Keay, who happened to be in India at the time, subscribed to the fund.³⁴

An international exhibition sponsored officially was to have been held in Calcutta in December 1883. In view of the anticipated presence of people from all over India at Calcutta, this opportunity was taken by Surendranath and his colleagues in the Indian Association to call the first National Conference. This was held from December 28 to 30 and, according to many historians, was the forerunner of the Indian National Congress. It was indeed thoroughly all-India in character attended by representatives from Northern India, Western India, Bihar and Orissa and by Hindus as well as Muslims. The first session was presided over by Ramtanu Lahiri, a renowned educationist. A number of resolutions were adopted pertaining to the Civil Service, the separation of the judiciary from the executive, representative government, Arms Act and so on. The resolution on the Civil Service question was moved by Surendranath himself. W. S. Blunt who was present at the conference paid a high tribute to Anandamohan and Surendranath as speakers and described the conference as "the first stage towards a national parliament".³⁵ The conference was a complete success.

Following this conference, Surendranath set out on another Northern India tour in the summer of 1884. He

³⁴ *History of Indian Association*, J. C. Bagal

³⁵ *India under Ripon*

visited a number of cities from Bankipore to Rawalpindi. The Civil Service question was still unsettled. Discontent with the Statutory Civil Service and the demand for the raising of the age limit for open competition and for simultaneous examinations were the main issues. There was also the question of raising the national fund and, underlying all this, the urge for a wider and unified agitation for political rights. Surendranath's tour was "eminently successful".³⁶ Memorials were addressed to the Secretary of State over the Civil Service issue. Subscriptions for the national fund were also promised.

An address drafted by Surendranath was presented on behalf of the Indian Association to Lord Dufferin, who succeeded Lord Ripon as Viceroy. The Viceroy's attention was drawn to the need for reform and reconstitution of the Provincial Legislative Councils. It is well known that initially Lord Dufferin encouraged and sympathised with the idea of an Indian National Congress on the lines suggested by Hume but later turned his face against it. Yet it was he who recommended a scheme for Council reconstitution which formed the basis of the Parliamentary Statute of 1892. In this connection the Viceroy is reported to have consulted men like Sir Henry Harrison and Mr. Cotton, both sympathetic towards Indian aspirations. Surendranath himself was invited by the Viceroy and had a long talk with him.

Mention must be made here of an agitation which Surendranath successfully carried on in the Hooghly district of Bengal. As a result of the introduction of what was known as the Outstill System for the sake of revenue, the sale of country liquor was cheapened leading to widespread drunkenness among the classes of the rural

³⁶ Report of the Indian Association 1884

population, of which pathetic evidence was gathered by Surendranath personally. Determined to save the people from the degrading effects of easy liquor. Surendranath started an intensive propaganda campaign by organising meetings, issuing appeals and so on in the whole district. Surendranath carried in his memory the deep early impression of the temperance movement of his youthful days. The Hooghly campaign anticipated the late Gandhian agitation against the drink evil. It was a mass agitation on a limited scale. In his autobiography Surendranath refers feelingly to his companions, particularly to Krishnakumar Mitra and Kalishankar Sukul, both of them dedicated public workers. The agitation bore fruit. The Government deputed the Magistrate of Howrah to enquire into the working of the Outstill System and on the result of the enquiry abolished it. Once again the agitator Surendranath won the day. Its success apart, the agitation was also an education for him. For the first time it brought him in contact with the peasant masses and helped broaden his sympathies.

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CHAPTER VIII

BIRTH OF THE CONGRESS

The time was now ripe for the birth of the Indian National Congress. It is not necessary to go into the details of that momentous event which came later to influence profoundly the course of Indian history. Suffice it to say that it was the inescapable logic of events which brought the Congress into being. The period from 1876 to 1884 was the seed time of Indian nationalism. It was during this period that national consciousness, vague and inchoate initially, took a concrete form. Local associations and organisations such as those in Calcutta, Bombay, Madras and Poona were tending to converge towards a common point of communion for political advancement and that common point was to be the Indian National Congress. Surendranath was closely connected with almost every event which contributed directly or indirectly to the growth of the climate for the emergence of the Congress. There is a controversy as to who exactly was the father of the Congress. Hume, of course, has an undoubted claim. But it is difficult to say that the Congress was the brain-child of any one person: the idea appears to have occurred to several persons simultaneously. That perhaps is the reason why Gandhiji said that Surendranath was "if not the originator, certainly one of the originators, of the National Congress" and that "in his time Surendranath was unsurpassed".⁵⁷ C. Rajagopalachari has also observed that the Indian National Conference was the forerunner of the National Congress and

⁵⁷ *Bengalee*, August 9, 1925

that Surendranath "was the father or at any rate one of the fathers of the Indian National Congress."³⁸

Encouraged by the success of the first National Conference, its sponsors, including Surendranath, convened a second National Conference in Calcutta in December 1885. The idea of a National Conference originated at the Delhi Durbar of 1877. The first one was held in 1883 in Calcutta; subsequently conferences on varying scales were being held at other centres as well. The informal Theosophist Convention at Madras in December 1884 deserves mention. But it was certainly creditable for Surendranath and his colleagues to have organised two national conferences in the space of three years only. The second conference too was national in the full sense of the term; it was attended by the representatives of more than thirty political associations from Northern India, besides those from other provinces, and by both Hindus and Muslims. From Bombay V. N. Mandalik was present. Bihar was represented by the Maharaja of Darbhanga. The leading articles of the *Bengalee* of this period bear out the zeal and dedication with which Surendranath was seeking to build up Indian nationalism on a firm footing. On the approach of the Conference, the *Bengalee* called attention to the meeting of the "national delegates" to discuss "problems of national importance". Instead of dissipating energy severally, it said, public bodies should combine on a common programme of political action, in other words, on a national platform.³⁹

The first resolution moved was on the reform of councils and by Surendranath himself. The other resolutions

³⁸ Quoted by K. K. Banerjee in his Bengali book *Rashtra Guruk Surendranath O' Parabarti Rashtriya Andolan*

³⁹ Editorial in *Bengalee* : "The Approaching National Conference in Calcutta". December 12, 1885

pertained to the Arms Act, Civil Service and so on. That the National Conference wanted to function exactly on the same lines as the National Congress did later is evident first from the resolution moved by Surendranath that the Conference should meet again in the following year and also from the consensus of the delegates from outside Bengal that it should meet from year to year in different places all over the country. The Conference sent a telegram expressing deep sympathy with the approaching Bombay Congress.

The first session of the Indian National Congress started in Bombay on December 28, 1885. The second National Conference had met in Calcutta on the 25th, 26th and 27th December, 1885. In his autobiography, Surendranath says : "The movements were simultaneous: the preliminary arrangements were made independently, neither party knowing what the other was doing until on the eve of the sittings of the Conference and of the Congress."⁴⁰ A. C. Mazumdar says that both were "simultaneous offshoots of the same movement".⁴¹ W. C. Bonarjea had invited Surendranath to attend the Congress, but it must have been too late for the latter to attend it in view of the National Conference, in the organisation of which he had a large share and which was meeting almost simultaneously. It also appears that K. T. Telang, who was present at the Madras Theosophist Convention, had asked Surendranath for some notes about the first National Conference. And Telang was an active organiser of the Bombay Congress. Yet strangely enough there was no communication from him to Surendranath about the Bombay Congress.

The very first session of the Congress passed resolutions on some of the issues which Surendranath, through

⁴⁰ *A Nation in Making*

⁴¹ *Indian National Evolution*

the Indian Association and later the National Conference, had been fighting for. Actually both groups of leaders were similarly motivated and working for a common objective.

Surendranath completely identified himself with the Congress and remained one of its most impressive figures until the Moderate-Extremist split of 1917. He was twice elected President. During this long period he failed to attend the Congress session only on two occasions.

Now that an all-India organisation had come into being for attending to common national problems, Surendranath extended his activity to another field, namely, provincial problems like sanitation, education, local self-governments and so on, which differed from province to province. He gave the lead in holding provincial conferences and the first one of its kind was held in Bengal in 1888. The movement spread to the other provinces. Later in many parts of India even district conferences came into vogue. In Bengal the provincial conferences were mammoth gatherings and were at times followed by social conferences over some of which Surendranath had occasion to preside. The two social problems which were exercising the public mind most were the raising of the marriage age of Hindu girls and the remarriage of Hindu widows. On both Surendranath had forward-looking views. He throws an interesting light on the public response to these progressive moves. Once or twice he advertised in the *Bengalee* for the remarriage of Brahmin widows and the response was surprisingly good. In one case he received more than 150 applications, including some from orthodox people.

The Calcutta Congress of 1886, presided over by Dadabhai Naoroji, was a meeting ground of the old generation of leadership and the new, of the middle class and the landed aristocracy. The British Indian Association, a

landholders' association representing the conservative section of the society, also joined it. Surendranath moved a resolution on the reform and enlargement of the councils, a subject after his heart. He moved the resolution on this subject in all future Congresses until the demand was met. Surendranath himself describes his passionate interest in, and single-minded devotion to, this and a few other leading public questions. in the following revealing passage in his autobiography :

"I have through life been under the periodical domination of a single overwhelming ideal. It was the Civil Service question, or local self-government, or the expansion of the Councils, or Swadeshi, with which was linked up the modification of the Partition, that filled the whole of my mental horizon, fired my enthusiasm, and absorbed my soul. For the time being I lived in my ideal. In all other spheres my movement was more or less mechanical. I persuaded myself that it was the one thing to be achieved priceless above all others, and I had no difficulty in persuading others."¹²

The next Congress was held in 1887 in Madras. The Bengal contingent, which included Sir Rashbehari Ghosh, proceeded by sea. Surendranath formed enduring friendships with a number of Southern leaders including Ananda-charlu, Viraraghavachariar, Rangaiah Naidu and G. Subrahmanyam Iyer. His friendship with the then Maharaja of Vizianagram, who patronised many public movements and institutions and whose very handsome donation gave the Indian Association its hall, deserves special mention.

At the Madras Congress, a resolution which was strongly supported by Surendranath was adopted, urging, the repeal of the Arms Act. At the same session, a delegate having given notice of a resolution demanding the prohibi-

tion of cow slaughter, the Congress was faced with the dilemma whether to allow the resolution with communal implications to be moved. Sir Syed Ahmed and his Patriotic Association had turned their face against the Congress. Muslim separatism had already been manifesting itself. Ultimately it was decided not to consider at the Congress session a resolution affecting a class or community if the same was objected to by the delegates representing that community, even though they were in a minority. This later became a recognised convention with the Congress.

The Allahabad Congress of 1888 was held despite the difficulty created by the bureaucracy, and the success of the session was due, among other things, to the untiring efforts of Pandit Ayodhyanath, Chairman of the Reception Committee. At the Bombay Congress of 1889, which was marked by an appreciative address to Charles Bradlaugh and the preparation of a skeleton scheme for Council Reform as a guideline for Bradlaugh's bill in Parliament the following year, Surendranath's task was to make an appeal for funds. The response was marvellous. More than Rs. 20,000 was paid on the spot, and another Rs. 44,000 was promised. Thus began the history of this great national organisation and Surendranath's eventful association with it for about 30 years.

One of the landmarks of this period was the Congress deputation to England in 1890, in pursuance of a resolution at the Bombay Congress. In a previous chapter we have seen how Lalmohan Ghosh had led a solo deputation to England over the Civil Service question and had achieved a considerable measure of success. In England itself there was a large body of persons who were sympathetic towards Indian aspirations. Already Dadabhai Naoroji had done valuable work in the matter of arousing enlightened British interest in Indian affairs through his organisations, the

London Indian Society and the East Indian Association. Surendranath had always believed that there was considerable scope of doing work in England on India's behalf, and this was demonstrated beyond doubt by the success achieved by the Congress deputation of 1890. The deputation consisted of Allen Hume, Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, Monomohan Ghosh, W. C. Bonarjea, Sharifuddin, Eardley Norton, R. N. Mudholkar and Surendranath. Its mission was to urge before the British public the need for political reforms in India. Every member of the deputation was expected to pay his own expense. Surendranath was not a rich man. His total savings at that time consisted of Rs. 13,000 invested in securities in the name of his wife, while the total expense of his English tour was estimated to be about Rs. 4,000. In other words, he was to spend nearly one-third of his none too affluent worldly reserve. This he was ready to do without hesitation. Equally unhesitatingly his wife, who had always been a source of silent inspiration behind his political work, came forward to offer the securities for encashment.

In England, the deputation was assisted by the British Committee of the Indian National Congress which organised the meetings. These meetings were a great success. Surendranath's magnificent oratory deeply impressed the British public. At all the meetings the demand was that Banerjea should visit them again. The deputation addressed meetings at various places in England, Scotland and Wales and ended up their labours with an interview with Gladstone. The result was that Gladstone urged a real and living representation to the people of India during the second reading of Lord Cross's Bill. This was a distinct gain towards the elective principle. Under the regulations framed by the Government under the Parliamentary Statute of 1892 the elective principle was indirectly recognised.

Members of the Imperial Council were allowed to ask questions, and budget discussion was permitted. This was no small gain considering the times, though negligible compared to what the country had been demanding.

A memorable debate was held at the Oxford Union, a stronghold of conservatism. Norton moved the Congress resolution regretting the non-recognition of the elective principle in the Bill then before the House of Commons. The opposition was led by Lord Hugh Cecil. Surendranath gave a powerful reply and the resolution was carried, demonstrating that the moderate Congress programme commended itself even to the most conservative sections of the British public.

On his return to India in July 1890, Surendranath was given a grand reception at the Framji Cowassji Institute in Bombay and also at Allahabad and Calcutta. At all these meetings he went on repeating the burden of his song, namely, that the work begun should be pushed on vigorously, among other things, by sending deputations to England. Immediately after his return, however, he found himself involved in serious difficulties over the affairs of the Ripon College. Due to a minor fault or lapse on the part of the College authorities, the Syndicate of the Calcutta University had recommended the disaffiliation of its law department for one year, which might mean disaster for the college itself. Surendranath had to move heaven and earth to get this recommendation rescinded and save the institution which he had built up with loving care.

The strain and worry he had been passing through was too much even for his iron constitution. One evening as he was getting ready to start for a dinner party, he felt feverish; it was found that he had had an attack of pneumonia. He, however, recovered early enough to attend the Calcutta Congress of 1890 where a resolution was passed appreciating the services of the Congress delegation to England.

CHAPTER IX

IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER

For nearly thirty years since 1861 the Government had not cared to introduce any measure of reform in the country. Reforms were now most urgently called for. The Congress was agitating for them and the public were expectant.

Indian constitutional development had since the Regulating Act of 1773 followed a path of cautious restrictions and calculated denials. Indian public opinion had been kept sedulously shut out from the executive as well as the legislative aspects of the administration. Those who had been associated with the same were mostly 'yes' men—princes, rajas, retired officials and so on. It was a Government without the necessary dialogue with the governed.

Under the Act of 1861 the Governor-General was empowered to nominate, for legislative purposes only, not less than six and not more than twelve additional members to the Governor-General's Council of whom at least half were to be non-officials. The powers of legislation taken away from the Provincial Governments by the Act of 1833 were restored and the Governor-General was empowered to establish some new Provincial Councils. The Act provided for the association of non-official members with legislation both in the Centre and the provinces. But the elective principle was still remote; the non-official members were to be nominated. They had practically no say in legislative matters which went on by executive fiat. The Act withheld from the members the right of interpellation and deliberation on policy matters. The powers of the Legislative Councils were severely restricted. The

agitation carried on by Surendranath and other Congress leaders thoroughly exposed the utter inadequacies of the 1861 reform.

The Act of 1892 enlarged the functions of the Legislative Councils. The members could now discuss the annual financial statements which were to be regularly placed before the legislature without, however, the power to move any resolution or divide the Council on any matter concerned with the budget. The right of interpellation was conceded, though not that of asking supplementaries. The non-official element in Council representation was increased. The Central Legislative Council was now to have not less than ten and not more than sixteen additional members and the minimum number of non-official members was increased to ten. In the case of Bengal the maximum number of members was fixed at twenty. The elective principle was thus grudgingly conceded but the elected persons could take their seats only after being nominated by the Government. The constituencies were certain corporate bodies, district boards, municipalities and so on, which, owing to the limited number of elective seats, were to get their chance of electing members to the Council by a system of rotation among themselves.

No wonder that some of the stalwarts of the Congress like Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, W. C. Bonarjea and Dadabhai Naoroji plainly criticised the Act. The Congress, while accepting the Act, was prompt in registering its regret "that the Act itself does not, in clear terms, concede to the people the right of electing their own representatives to the Council".⁴⁷ In his Poona Congress Presidential Address, Surendranath emphasised the need of increasing the number of elected members which, he felt, could be done by a

small modification in the Statute of 1892. Regarding the restriction on the members' right in respect of budget discussion, Surendranath described it as "altogether a needless restriction".⁴⁴

In one respect, however, Surendranath praised the Reforms of 1892. It was because the electorates did not represent any communal interest. Indeed it was the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 which ushered in the communal electorates and thus helped the growth of Muslim sectarianism.

In 1893, Surendranath was elected to the Bengal Legislative Council from the Calcutta Corporation of which he had been a member since the introduction of the elective principle in that body in 1876. He was opposed by two other candidates, Babu Kalinath Mitra and Babu Joygovinda Laha, both veterans in civic matters. Returned at the head of the poll, Surendranath became the Calcutta Corporation's first representative in a reformed legislature. He remained a member of the Council for eight consecutive years from 1893 to 1901. He was returned for the second term from the Corporation and for the third and fourth terms from the municipalities and the district boards of the Presidency Division. In 1897, when it was the turn of the municipalities of the Dacca Division to elect a representative to the Council and Surendranath had consequently no chance of being returned, the Lieutenant-Governor exercised his discretionary powers to allow the privilege that year to the municipalities of the Presidency Division so as to ensure the return of Surendranath. His presence in the Council was considered essential by the Government in connection with the Calcutta Municipal Bill then before the House.

⁴⁴ *Report of the Poona Congress 1895*

Surendranath's association with the Calcutta Corporation and certain local bodies of Bengal was very intimate and long. The development of local self-government on an elective basis and in freedom from official interference was an overmastering passion of his life, even as the Civil Service question was, and he fought for its fulfilment tooth and nail. He believed, as already stated, that local self-government was the first step to national self-government. Two measures of considerable importance which came up before the Council during his membership were the amendment of the Bengal Municipal Act and a complete revision of the Calcutta Municipal Act. The way he fought against attempts to emasculate local self-government in Bengal through official interference and control of local self-governing bodies is a part of history now.

Despite the fine spirit breathed into India's civic scene by two liberal Viceroys, Lord Mayo and Lord Ripon, local self-government in India came to receive rude shocks from time to time at the hands of the bureaucrats who nursed an innate distrust of Indians. It is in this light that one has to view the introduction of the two above-mentioned Bills in the Bengal Legislative Council. They were a complete negation of the ideas of Lord Ripon, rightly called the father of local self-government in India. The Bengal Municipal Act, plainly a reactionary measure, was aimed at depriving the municipalities of the right to elect their chairmen and the commissioners of the right to decide upon the sub-division of a municipality. In other words, the Government wanted to arrogate to itself the powers given to the municipalities under law. Surendranath fought hard against this official high-handedness. He organised protests in the press and on the platform, but all in vain. Undaunted, he did an extraordinary thing which perhaps no other politician would have thought of doing. He wrote a

long letter to Hume in England requesting him to apprise Lord Ripon, who was now a member of the British Cabinet, and whose handiwork the bureaucracy was out to destroy, with the mischievous import of the Bill. Lord Ripon at once referred the matter to Lord Kimberley: then Secretary of State for India. One fine morning, Sir Charles Elliott, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, who was the sponsor of the reactionary Bill, came to the Council to announce that the provisions to which exception had been taken should be dropped. The interests of the local bodies in the mofussil areas of Bengal were thus saved by one stroke of Surendranath's bold strategy.

But a tougher fight was awaiting Surendranath, in which he, and not the Government, had to yield. That was in connection with what is known as the Mackenzie Bill. The author of the Bill was Sir Alexander Mackenzie who succeeded Sir Charles Elliott as the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. Sir Alexander had a deep distrust of local self-governing institutions. It was he who had described the Calcutta Corporation as an armoury of talks and arsenal of delays. The amending Bill sought to reduce the supremacy of the Corporation by making the Chairman, who used to be an official, independent of the Corporation. It aimed at crippling the democratic constitution of the Calcutta Corporation and created widespread public resentment in the city. For two years the Bill was debated in the Assembly and then placed before a Select Committee from which it emerged without any appreciable change. Lord Curzon, the then Governor-General, gave the *coup d'grace* to the element of self-government in the Corporation by issuing a mandate reducing the number of elected members to be at par with that of nominated members. As the Chairman was an official, this mandate gave a standing majority to the official element as against the elected ele-

ment. The Bill was adopted in September, 1899 and made effective from April, 1900. As a member of the Select Committee, Surendranath gave a hard and strenuous fight to the Bill. But the Government was unrelenting. Having failed to get the Bill modified or stopped, Surendranath, along with 27 other Commissioners, resigned from the Corporation in protest. But outside he continued to fight against the bureaucratisation of the Corporation, until, at a much later date, it fell to his lot to undo it as a Minister himself. This was one of the first non-violent and constitutional protests against arbitrary official action, anticipating the later boycott movement. The labour and strain of these activities had proved so heavy that Surendranath fell a victim to brain fever. It took him quite some time to recover from what was one of the severest illnesses from which he had ever suffered.

The local self-government issue was no longer a parochial one but soon assumed an all-India character. The Madras Congress of 1898 adopted a resolution deplored the reactionary policy of the Government in respect of the Calcutta Corporation and the Bombay City Improvement Trust. In the following year, the Congress adopted a similar resolution expressing its disapproval "of the reactionary policy, subversive of local self-government, evidenced by the passing of the Calcutta Municipal Act and by the introduction into the Legislative Council of Bombay of a similar measure..."⁴⁵ Moving the resolution, Surendranath said that the hope of the previous Congress that Lord Curzon would revise the current reactionary policy had not been realised. Stressing how the civic rights of Calcutta had been destroyed and how the gulf between the rulers and the ruled had been widening, he said : "There is re-

⁴⁵ *How India Wrought for Freedom*, Annie Besant

action in their policy, reaction in opinion, reaction along the entire line, reaction in the order of the day... They would fain roll back the tide of progress which has set in with such irresistible force".⁴⁶

To go back to the events of 1893. On June 2 that year, the British House of Commons adopted a resolution, moved by Herbert Paul, favouring simultaneous Civil Service examinations in India and England. Dadabhai Naoroji was a Member of the Parliament at that time and the moving spirit behind the resolution. Not anticipating defeat, the Government had not cared to rally its strength, while Dadabhai had done intensive lobbying. The British officialdom was struck by a bombshell as it were. The Secretary of State tried to brush it aside as a snap vote not representing the judgment of the House. The opinion of the Indian authorities was sought. Every Provincial Government except that of Madras opposed it. The purpose of the resolution was thus nullified by officialdom in India.

In this connection, Sir Anthony MacDonnell, officiating Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, sent for Surendranath and asked him why he was so keen about simultaneous examinations. Surendranath gave a reply which was as categorical as it was forceful. He said : "Because...we have lost all faith in nominations...I repeat, nominations by Government cannot, and will not, satisfy us". This was a sufficiently emphatic repudiation of current official policies.

At the Madras Congress of 1894 Surendranath once again moved a resolution on what Mrs. Annie Besant called "the evergreen subject of simultaneous examinations",⁴⁷ and thoroughly exposed how British promises of equal treatment had been broken. The two issues to which he had

⁴⁶ *How India Wrought for Freedom*

⁴⁷ *Ibid*

stuck steadfastly were the wider scope of employment for Indians in high offices and the establishment of representative institutions. It was his belief that "if power were vested in us to legislate, to control the finances and to carry on administration through and by our own men, in accordance with principles laid down by our own representatives, we should have self-government in the truest sense, and possess the amplest facilities for developing our powers and faculties and taking our legitimate place among the nations of the earth".⁴⁸

At Madras Surendranath was invited to address a students meeting. The topic was whether students should discuss or take part in politics. Surendranath participated in it and expressed the view that "students should certainly discuss politics and may even, subject to proper control and guidance, take part in political work".⁴⁹ Pandit Madan mohan Malaviya opposed him. It may be recalled that Surendranath refused to join the Calcutta University Institute because students were precluded from discussing politics there. His conviction had always been that it was unwise to exclude students from politics. Students were bound to have some sort of politics, good or bad, and it was sheer wisdom to teach them the right sort through the right kind of methods. But he always deprecated rowdyism and indiscipline on the part of the youth. He said that discipline was the soul of student life. Even at that time, he had noticed indiscipline creeping into our homes and educational institutions and only wished that it was a temporary phase. His fond expectation has, alas, not been fulfilled.

CHAPTER X

AS CONGRESS PRESIDENT

In November 1895 Surendranath received an invitation from Mahadev Govind Ranade, the great leader of all public movements in Western India in those days, to preside over the Poona session of the Congress that year. He accepted the honour. The Poona Congress session was later "universally acknowledged to have been the most brilliant session".⁴⁹ The office of the Congress President was not elective at that time; the Reception Committee used to make the choice. Perhaps the first signs of dispute over the presidentship of the Congress were evident in 1906, which eventually led to a split between the Moderates and the Extremists the following year.

Despite his multifarious obligations, namely, professorial duties, journalistic occupation and Corporation work, Surendranath devoted himself heart and soul to the preparation of the Presidential Address which became a classic piece of oratorical excellence. For over two hours every day for six weeks at a stretch, he did extraordinarily hard labour to prepare the marathon speech.

Surendranath was proposed to the chair by Ananda Charlu, the motion having been seconded and supported by Dr. Bahadurji and R. N. Mudholkar respectively. The Congress report says: "Mr. Banerjea has always been the first favourite on Congress platforms. He occupies the foremost place among Indian orators".⁵⁰ Dr. Bahadurji

⁴⁹ Report of the Poona Congress, 1895

⁵⁰ Ibid

described him as "a real man of the people whom the country delighteth to honour."⁵¹

Presiding over the session, Surendranath delivered his magnificent speech depending entirely on his memory without consulting any notes, and keeping at the same time an assembly of five thousand spell-bound by his oratory. "The President's inaugural address was in every way worthy of the man and the occasion. The speaker's voice, clear, ringing and powerful, and his stirring and impressive delivery made the oration which took full three hours a most extraordinary—a supreme effort of human eloquence".⁵² The reception he received at Poona was overwhelming—a symbol of the people's recognition of his services to the nation. He was particularly happy to think that a school-master and agitator had been so honoured outside his own province.

Surendranath recalls in his autobiography how the audience became electrified with a unique emotional upsurge as he was getting ready to deliver his prepared concluding speech. It was no longer a speaker inspiring an audience but *vice versa*. Surendranath was so much moved by the surging emotional response of the audience that he threw away his prepared speech and spoke extempore. The speech remains an undying tribute to his great patriotism, his complete dedication to the cause of Indian nationalism. He declared: "If I would have lived for this moment and this moment alone, and then have breathed my last, I should have considered myself the happiest amongst men. I know you wish me a long life. Whether it shall be a long life or whether it shall be a short life, whatever it may be, I call upon the Almighty God to witness this proclamation...this solemn vow I take before the eyes of assem-

⁵¹ Report of the Poona Congress, 1895

⁵² *Ibid*!

bled India that it shall be dedicated to your service. Yea, it shall be dedicated to the fulfilment of those aspirations, those hopes, those ideas, which have been voiced forth by the united dignity and majesty of my nation."⁵³ At the end of this grand oration, there was a rush from the younger sections of the audience to the dais to take the dust of his feet.

A brief analysis of the speech will be relevant here. Refuting the insinuation in a section of the English press that the Congress had found a place in the Hindu pantheon, Surendranath asserted : "It is the Congress of the united India, of Hindus, of Mohamedans, of Christians, of Parsees and of Sikhs...here we stand upon a common platform—here we have all agreed to bury our social and religious differences". Indeed, the Congress had come to represent his life-long dream of united India and a secular India where religion was no bar to common nationhood or to the pursuit of common political ideals.

The Indian Councils Act of 1892 came up for scathing criticism by Surendranath. "In Bengal seven elected members represent the living strength and the vital forces of a whole community of seventy millions of people", he said. Was this the "living representation" Gladstone had spoken of? He urged modification of the Statute to increase the elective content of membership. Similarly he characterised the restrictions placed upon members in respect of budget discussion as entirely "needless".

With a remarkable grasp of Indian finance, Surendranath exposed the Government's policy of drain. "It is no exaggeration to say that the financial position of India is one of ever-recurring deficit and of ever-increasing debt", and this he attributed to the Government's "aggressive

⁵³ Report of the Poona Congress, 1895

military policy". a policy which was "so disastrous to the financial interests of India" but which was "being followed by our rulers with unabated zeal". He referred to the Chitral expedition as an instance and proved statistically how India had to bear the increasing financial burden of this policy of adventurism only to be pauperized in the process.

In connection with the quest for a scientific frontier, he said : "Times without number have we in Congress assembled...protested against the extravagant military expenditure of the Government... A scientific frontier cannot constantly be receding in the distance like *ignis fatuus*, as you advance towards it...the true scientific frontier against Russian invasion does not lie in some remote inaccessible mountain which has yet to be discovered, nor is it to be found in the House of Commons, as some one said, but it lies deep in the grateful hearts of a loyal and contented people". He thundered: "We have fought the wars of England in the past with our blood and treasure. In the Abyssinian Expedition it was we who fought and bled; it was the Indian Government which spent its treasure and sacrificed the lives of its brave soldiers". The Central Asian policy was not of Indian interest only; it was of interest to Great Britain as a European and Asiatic power. Why should then all the enormous expenditure in that connection be thrown upon the Indian exchequer? His criticism of the home charges, in the name of which the Indian treasury was being drained away, was mercilessly scathing. "The home charges", he said, "constitute a serious drain and add to the ever-increasing poverty of the country".

Surendranath quoted statistics from British and Indian authorities to prove the appalling poverty of the Indian people and called attention to the recurring cycles of famines, through which an average Indian had to pass

his life, to his pitifully poor income and to the high taxes he had to pay. "It is no wonder then", he said, throwing glaring light upon the pathetic condition of his countrymen, "that forty millions of our people live upon one meal a day..." About Indian industries, he stressed how they were being sought to be crippled in the interest of the cotton and jute manufacturers of England. "Ours is a political organisation; but we cannot overlook considerations which affect the development of our industries and our manufactures... Their conservation is a matter of grave national importance." The question of the wider employment of Indians in public services, a favourite subject with Surendranath, received a new economic justification. The employment of foreign personnel with fat salaries in high posts led to the draining away of the country's resources to England and thus had a positive bearing upon the poverty of Indians. This was morally wrong, economically disastrous and politically inexpedient..."

The speech covered the whole gamut of the public issues of the day, including the admission of Indians to high military ranks and the separation of the judiciary from the executive. One point he made with particular emphasis. With his enthusiasm for work in England on India's behalf, Surendranath urged that India should be taken up as a party question in British politics, since that alone could ensure full, enlightened and sympathetic British public interest in Indian affairs.

The speech is counted among the most remarkable political orations of those days. It was a powerful array of facts, arguments and analysis leavened with an equally powerful political passion. Inspired by the eighteenth and nineteenth century masters of English political speaking, Surendranath's speeches were marked by an oratorical flair, a certain degree of emotionalism. While some of

his Congress colleagues were more down-to-earth. Surendranath moved on a high plane of inspired eloquence. There was magic in his spoken word; he could electrify mammoth gatherings. But he was never without basis in concrete facts and in hard political realities. He knew the art of imparting to dull data and dry details the power of an irresistible appeal. He breathed his own fine fervour into them.

Throughout the speech there are evidences of an implicit faith in, and an admiration for, England. Like most Congress leaders of the day, Surendranath considered the British connection almost as a historical necessity, and put his faith in England for helping the political advancement of India. Nevertheless the speech is unsparing in its attack on the wrongs and injustices the Government had been doing to India. The criticisms are sober and restrained but scathing all the same. The voice of an undaunted patriot spoke through the address, that of an agitator quivered with an irrepressible emotion. Needless to say, the speech was very well received and earned high appreciation—even from Englishmen.

Surendranath has given us in his reminiscences some hints about the secret of his spell-binding oratory. The first of these was laborious preparation; with John Bright he believed that a speech was not worth listening to unless it was a prepared one. To be successful in public speaking a man should, he felt, not only have intellectual equipment but also moral and emotional inspiration. He must have patriotism and true zeal for a cause in the heart of his heart. His thoughts must spring from his heart and pass on to his brain.

Surendranath now came to occupy the centre of the nation's political stage and became a national leader in the fullest sense of the term. He became President of

the Congress once again at Ahmedabad in 1902. But whether president or not, "Surendranath Banerjea was session after session the central figure in the Congress".⁵⁴

In 1896, the Congress met at Calcutta. The Chairman of the Reception Committee was Sir Romeshchandra Mitra who was in many ways Justice Ranade's replica in Bengal. Surendranath moved a resolution on the famines which had started stalking the land. The resolution attributed the recurring famines to the drain on the wealth of the country, over-taxation and over-assessment and the Government's policy of extravagance in civil and military expenditure—practically the same thesis which Surendranath had expounded in his Poona address. Moving the resolution he said that the famines "came through the blunders of our Rulers" and that they were "nature's reminders to Government to amend their ways".⁵⁵

A distinctive feature of the Calcutta Congress was an industrial exhibition as an annexe to the Congress. The Swadeshi idea was germinating. It was J. Chaudhuri, an industrial pioneer, who with Surendranath's warm support sponsored the idea of the industrial exhibition. A Calcutta barrister, J. Chaudhuri was a son-in-law of Surendranath. Sir John Woodburn, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, refused to open the exhibition, despite Surendranath's personal request to him because, he said, it had a strong political flavour. The Maharaja of Cooch Behar did the opening. Ten years later Lord Minto, the then Viceroy, opened a similar exhibition. The attitude of the British rulers towards the Congress had passed through many changes and variations depending on the prevailing political climate. While Lord Dufferin and Lord Conne-

⁵⁴ *Indian Politics since Mutiny*, Chintamani

⁵⁵ *How India Wrought for Freedom*

mara reacted favourably to the Congress in Calcutta and Madras respectively, Sir Anthony MacDonnel, Lieutenant-Governor of the United Provinces, rather made things hot for the Lucknow session of the Congress in 1899.

CHAPTER XI

THE ERA OF MODERATE NATIONALISM

The Congress movement in the pre-independence era may be divided into three broad stages: from 1885 to 1906, from 1906 to 1918 and from 1918 onwards. In the first phase the Congress was unchallengeably in the custody of moderate nationalism of which Surendranath was an eloquent exponent. The leaders of the early Indian Congress had great faith in British liberalism and justice. "The Indian liberals had almost an unlimited faith in British democracy." Indian liberalism drew its sustenance from British representative institutions, from the parliamentary institutions working successfully in Britain, from the western masters of political philosophy, indeed from the totality of the western heritage itself. "Indian liberalism is the product of British liberalism".⁵⁶

The first great liberal of India was Raja Rammohan Roy who initiated the principle of constitutional agitation for redressing political wrongs. Liberalism became a regular tenet with our pioneer patriots who had a firm faith in the essential fairness of the English and believed that, if they were properly apprised of the Indian situation and demand, they would not fail to do justice to India. Their complaint was not so much against the Englishman as against the system of Anglo-Indian bureaucracy. Their methods consisted of petitions, memorials, appeals and resolutions. They were averse to any agitation of an unconstitutional or revolutionary type. Their demands were: Indianization of the services, expansion of the

⁵⁶ *Rise and Growth of Indian Liberalism*, M. A. Buch

Councils, enlargement of the Press, reduction of military expenditure, separation of the judiciary from the executive and such other moderate reforms. Their maximum demand was colonial self-government within the empire. It may be argued that initially the clash between the ruler and the ruled had not become precipitate enough to make a revolutionary struggle inevitable or even necessary. This fact encouraged early liberalism and put upon it an increasing premium until new forces arose to give it a rude shock. But when these forces did arise, most of the liberals failed to rise to the occasion and consequently got detached from the main stream of national struggle.

Nobody will, perhaps, blame the early Congress leaders for their calculated moderation of views as well as methods. This moderation was indeed a part of the historical process. "Let us express our deep and abiding sense of gratitude to the great men", says Dr. Sitaramayya, "that led the van of progress in the earlier generation of our public life."⁵⁷ Their achievements were by no means negligible. They had laid solidly the foundation upon which the superstructure of the demand for complete independence was later laid. Colonial self-government, Home Rule within the empire and Swaraj—these concepts were necessary links in the evolution of the country's political goal.

Surendranath belonged to the liberal school of political thought in India, but with a distinction. He too had an unshaken faith in the British sense of justice and fair-play and believed in evolutionary methods, not revolutionary. But the patriot in Surendranath was far stronger than the liberal. That is why even among his moderate colleagues he claims a distinction peculiar to himself. In fact, with his

⁵⁷ *History of the Congress*

faith in constitutional methods. He had been an agitator right from the beginning of his career and for many years remained a suspect in British official circles. At one stage even his deportation was rumoured. Apart from being one of the earliest Indians to have faced imprisonment in the public cause, Surendranath initiated non-co-operation as a principle of political struggle by resigning from the Calcutta Corporation and keeping out of the Bengal Council as a protest against the Mackenzie Bill and the Partition of Bengal respectively. During the Swadeshi movement his popularity was at its peak. In the eyes of the people he became a symbol of effective mass movement against British injustice, and in the eyes of the officialdom a fire-brand agitator. He himself did not believe in terrorism or revolutionary methods. Nevertheless these were in a large measure strengthened by the mass upheaval during the Partition movement, behind which was the magnetic personality of Surendranath.

Other stalwarts of the Congress of those days with whom Surendranath worked and was in close collaboration are hallowed names in Indian history. The most important among them was, of course, the grand old man, Dadabhai Naoroji, thrice Congress President. It was under his presidency that the Congress met in Calcutta during the fateful partition days of 1906, where the famous resolution on Swaraj and Swadeshi was passed. Even in that Congress, where a clash was being expected between the Moderates on the one hand and the Extremists under Tilak on the other, it was a brain wave of Surendranath which saved the situation for the former. He and Bhupendranath Basu sent a cable to the grand old man requesting him to accept the Congress Presidentship thinking that nobody would have the courage to contest him. This political strategy paid. In many ways Surendra-

nath carried forward Dadabhai's work, specially the work in England. Surendranath had many contacts with Dadabhai. Dadabhai was a member of the Welby Commission before which Surendranath testified.

About Justice Ranade reference has already been made. Ranade's contribution to Indian social reform, to economic thought and to Indian nationalism is doubtless inestimable and Surendranath always recognised him as the moving spirit behind all public movements in Western India. During the Poona Congress of 1895, sharp differences arose over the holding of a Social Conference in the Congress pandal, which might even have disrupted the Congress itself. It was Ranade's tact and patriotism which saved the situation.

R. N. Mudholkar was one of Surendranath's colleagues on the Congress delegation to England in 1890. A hard-working Congressman, who became its President in 1912, he was also a keen student of Indian politics and economics. Surendranath tells us that his mastery of facts, clear presentation and deep earnestness made a profound impression on the British public.

Surendranath first came in contact with Pandit Ayodhya Nath, the undisputed leader of the Congress movement in the United Provinces, during his tour of Northern India in 1877. Ayodhya Nath's organising abilities came conspicuously to the forefront when the fourth Congress met at Allahabad in 1888 in the face of heavy odds. Ayodhya Nath was the chairman of the Reception Committee. Surendranath recognises that this warm-hearted patriot overcame all difficulties, thereby vindicating the triumph of the popular will over bureaucratic opposition.

For Gokhale Surendranath had high admiration. He

calls him "one of the greatest political leaders of his generation",⁵⁸ and deplores his premature death.

G Subramanya Iyer is called "one of the makers of modern Madras".⁵⁹ He too unfortunately died early. Of Dinshaw Wacha Surendranath speaks with extraordinary warmth saying that "no one can speak without admiration for his personal worth and public character".⁶⁰ Pherozeshah Mehta, who was the real power behind the Congress for several years, was one of Surendranath's fellow delegates to England in 1890. In 1902, it was at the insistence of Pherozeshah Mehta and others that Surendranath accepted the invitation to preside over the Ahmedabad Congress. At the Surat Congress of 1907, Mehta was active on the side of the Moderates, and when chairs and slippers were hurled at the dais and there was a rush towards it, Mehta and Surendranath had to be together escorted away. Companions in Congress work, they were now companions in dark discomfiture.

In 1897 Surendranath was invited to give evidence as an Indian member from Bengal before a Royal Commission in England presided over by Lord Welby and having Dadabhai Naoroji as one of its members. The purpose of the Commission was to enquire into Indian expenditure and the financial relations between India and Britain. The other invitees were Gokhale and Dinshaw Wacha from Bombay and G. Subramanya Iyer from Madras. Doubts were expressed in certain official quarters as to whether Surendranath, who was not an expert on finance, would be able to give a good account of himself. Surendranath, who had made hard preparation for the task, completely

⁵⁸ *A Nation in Making*

⁵⁹ *Ibid*

⁶⁰ *Ibid*

belied all such prognostications by showing himself a master of Indian finance and standing successfully a severe examination by the Commission, lasting practically a whole day. Gokhale, who was present during the cross-examination, called Surendranath's evidence "brilliant". Though a member of the Commission, Dadabhai still submitted himself for cross-examination. Indeed it is wrong to suppose that Surendranath was not well versed in Indian finance. His two presidential addresses at the Poona and Ahmedabad sessions of the Congress show his clear grasp of public finance in India and the then existing financial relationship between India and England, which was utterly unjust and iniquitous for India. He was most severely cross-examined on the issue of Indians' admission to public services—a test he stood very well.

The little time he could spare after his evidence he utilized in addressing public meetings. He spoke from the same platform with Dadabhai Naoroji at Sunderland.

Meanwhile the political climate of India began changing. Behind the unruffled surface of things, new forces, new thought currents, were gathering momentum, and it was not long before extremism started knocking at the doors. The Reforms of 1892, which had failed to satisfy even the Moderates, had naturally shaken the faith of large sections of the people in the path of appeals and petitions. Inspired by a fresh spirit of enquiry, young India was no longer prepared to accept British control without question and without challenge. Tilak, whose emergence into Indian politics was a major event of this era, came to symbolize the new spirit. A brilliant scholar, a magnificent orator, and a forceful writer, Tilak entered Indian politics with his philosophy of defiance. He wanted the Congress to show more grit. Political rights, he felt, would have to be fought for and not won

through persuasion, as the Moderates believed. Tilak had started in Maharashtra the Shivaji and Ganapati festivals in order to kindle among the people a new patriotic fervour, courage and discipline. Hindu revivalism, which received a stimulus from Tilak's writings, the achievements of Swami Vivekananda and the activities of the Theosophical Society, got woven into the texture of extremist politics, particularly in Maharashtra and Bengal. It was a time when 20 million people in 70,000 square miles of Indian territory were in the grip of a severe famine, while the Government of India indulged in the costly luxury of celebrating the Jubilee of Queen Victoria, thereby betraying supreme callousness towards the people's miseries. It was also the time when the outbreak of bubonic plague in Bombay led to drastic and humiliating anti-plague measures by the Government, followed by the murder of Rand and Lieutenant Ayerst. The subsequent arrest and imprisonment of Tilak on a sedition charge, the deportation without trial of the Natu brothers under an old moth-eaten regulation and the panicky promulgation of other repressive measures led to a very disquieting situation in the country. Mrs. Besant traces the growth of extremism to the plague outbreak and the subsequent events.

The Amravati session of the Congress, presided over by Sankaran Nair, met in December 1897 under the dark shadow of all these events. Surendranath was entrusted with moving a resolution on the special powers exercised by the Government through the revival of obsolete regulations. In this connection he urged either the trial or the release of the Natu brothers. Surendranath had had occasion to enjoy the hospitality of the Natu brothers while at Poona as Congress President. The resolution strongly deprecated the exercise of such extraordinary powers and recommended that where the Government

intended to take action under such regulations, it must notify its intention and that detention without trial must in no case be for more than three months.

At the Congress an attempt to pass a special resolution on the release of Tilak failed. But "what was lost in the Congress was gained in the speeches of the President, Sir Sankaran Nair, and of Surendranath Banerjea".⁶¹ Moving the resolution Surendranath said: "For Mr. Tilak my heart is full of sympathy. My feelings go forth to him in his prison house. A nation is in tears".⁶² Surendranath's broad catholicity of mind and deep patriotism are abundantly clear from what he spoke about Tilak, his political opponent. It was not a formal reference that he made. It came from the depth of his grief-laden heart.

Surendranath was scrupulously fair to his political opponents. This was seen again during Mrs. Besant's incarceration. Although he had political differences with Mrs. Besant, he did not hesitate to preside over two protest meetings at Calcutta to condemn her internment, and this he did strongly enough and without reservation.

It is incidentally to be mentioned that bringing old, rusted regulations back into use assumed wider importance in the years following the Partition movement in Bengal and the spread of extremism elsewhere in the country, when a number of prominent Bengal leaders and also men like Lala Lajpat Rai and Ajit Singh of Punjab were deported under similarly resurrected regulations. Surendranath was thoroughly unreconciled to such use of arbitrary and extraordinary powers. He said: "A bad law in the hands of rulers owning no responsibility to the people is

⁶¹ *History of the Congress*, Sitaramayya

⁶² *How India Wrought for Freedom*

apt to be worked in a manner that often creates grave public dissatisfaction."⁶³

Surendranath's approach to the problem, as evident from his speech at the Amraoti Congress, was this. Indians, he said, were born British subjects and thus entitled to the same rights and privileges which the Britons had earned through their Magna Carta and Habeas Corpus and which they were in full enjoyment of. These rights, including the inestimable right of personal liberty, he stressed, must be earned by Indians by every constitutional means. Referring to the indiscriminate use of arbitrary powers, Surendranath said : "... security of life and property are the great foundation upon which rests... the fabric of British rule in India. What becomes of those inestimable blessings if at any moment your property may be confiscated, and you may be arrested, kept in custody for months together, without trial and without a word of explanation? What becomes of the boasted vaunt of personal liberty and personal security under British rule under these circumstances?"⁶⁴ This was Surendranath, a moderate, a constitutionalist, but an ardent champion of liberty the suppression of which in any shape or form would not go without a spirited challenge from him.

⁶³ *A Nation in Making*

⁶⁴ *How India Wrought for Freedom*

CHAPTER XII

THE CURZON REGIME

Lord Curzon assumed the Viceroyalty of India in 1898 at a time when the political atmosphere was charged with grave symptoms of discontent and unrest. He did nothing, however, to quieten the situation but everything to aggravate it. One of the most controversial Viceroys that had ever come to India, Lord Curzon was a very talented, hard-working and efficient administrator, having a good deal of initiative and power of eloquence. But the policies pursued by him were reactionary and thus made him extremely unpopular. He lacked that sympathetic understanding of the people whom he governed which is the real hallmark of a statesman.

In the Madras session of the Congress in 1898, soon after the assumption of office by Lord Curzon, Surendra-nath moved a resolution according him a welcome and hoping that he would govern the country according to the best traditions of British rule. The resolution was communicated by the President, Anandamohan Bose, to the Viceroy who made a formal gesture by thanking the Congress. But the hope expressed in the resolution was not to be fulfilled.

On behalf of the Indian Association again Surendra-nath led a deputation to Lord Curzon in 1899 and read out an address of welcome. A very unpleasant incident, giving a foretaste of things to come, occurred. As they were waiting for the Viceroy in the Throne Room, two of the members of the deputation who had Indian pump-shoes on were asked by an aide-de-camp either to take

off their shoes or to retire from the deputation. They chose the latter course. This caused bitter resentment among the delegation members who did not withdraw in a body only because they thought that the courtesy thus shown to the Viceroy might ultimately prejudice India's interest.

Another occasion when Surendranath came in personal contact with Lord Curzon was a public meeting in Calcutta to honour the memory of Queen Victoria which was presided over by the Viceroy. Surendranath spoke and was congratulated by the Viceroy's Private Secretary. The twain, the Viceroy and Surendranath, never met again. This was not a mere coincidence. History had definitely assigned them antagonistic roles. Surendranath soon became one of Curzon's biggest headaches. Neither was Surendranath ever again bidden to his presence, nor did he feel inspired by the Viceroy's public measures to seek an interview with him.

In 1898 Surendranath's house at Simultala, a health resort about 217 miles from Calcutta, was complete. From the British he had learnt the salutary practice of retiring to a healthy place amidst beautiful surroundings for an annual rest and change. The Simultala house was meant for this purpose of rest cure, punctuated by moderate doses of intellectual work. It was there that he later prepared his presidential speech for the Ahmedabad Congress of 1902. The greater portion of his autobiography was also written there.

About this time a gruesome tragedy took place which illustrates Surendranath's human sympathy as well as his public spirit. Dr. Sureshekandra Sarkar was a very well-known physician of Barrackpore and a family physician and friend of Surendranath. One night, as he was preparing to leave his dispensary, three intoxicated European

soldiers came, had an altercation with him and brutally assaulted him leading to his death in hospital within a short time. Full of grief as well as indignation, Surendranath took up the matter vigorously. He at once approached the District Magistrate at Alipore and apprised him of the full details of the dastardly crime. Knowing the temper of the European jury in those days, he pursued the case with great care even from the start, so that the criminals might be brought to book. He even approached the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal and publicised the matter in England, as a result of which a question was asked in Parliament and a communication was received in the matter by the Government of India from the Secretary of State. All the three offenders were tried and held guilty of inflicting grievous hurt, though acquitted on the more serious charges. They were, therefore, accorded the maximum punishment under the laws on the lesser charge.

On another occasion he interested himself in an incident of a similar nature. An old man, Gurdit Maiti by name, was assaulted by two Europeans and died of the injuries. Surendranath ventilated this matter in the *Bengalee* and approached the Lieutenant-Governor. One of the culprits was later brought to book, the other having gone over to South Africa. Such cases of assaults by Europeans on Indians were not uncommon in those days.

In the Congress of 1899, presided over by R. C. Dutt, Surendranath moved a resolution, very different from the one he had moved the previous year welcoming Lord Curzon to India. The resolution criticised the government's reactionary policy, subversive of local self-government, evidenced by the passing of the Calcutta Municipal Act and the introduction of a similar measure in the Bombay Legislative Council. In a forthright and memorable speech, Surendranath analysed the provisions of the Act and showed how

the civic rights of Calcutta had been destroyed by it. Surendranath referred to Lord Curzon's earlier sympathetic utterance about India and his later unsympathetic performance. He said, in words apparently mild but strong and striking in effect : "Read that speech, contrast that speech with the policy. The speech, how noble, how generous, how sympathetic; the policy, how narrow, how illiberal, how-un-English".⁶⁵

This was not all. Looking at the trend of contemporary affairs, he sounded a note of warning which in the light of later events proved extremely timely. But it was lost upon the rulers. He said that there were two ways of getting wrongs righted, constitutional and revolutionary. "Sir, in these days...the greatest bulkwark of all the governments...is the contentment, the gratitude and the affection of the people. How is the affection of the people to be won except by the removal of grievances, and how are the people to remove their grievances except by the adoption of constitutional means or the adoption of revolutionary measures ?"⁶⁶ Affirming that the Congress was for reform, he warned that there were others who might be for revolution and stressed the urgency of introducing early reform because, he felt, there was no intermediary step between the two.

Both in the Congress session of 1900 at Lahore and of 1901 at Calcutta, Surendranath moved resolutions demanding the wider employment of Indians in the different branches of the public services. At Lahore he quoted irrefutable facts to show the pathetically low percentage of Indians in high posts in the different departments—and all this in the face of the Queen's Proclamation of 1858 granting equality of treatment. There could be no more

⁶⁵ *How India Wrought for Freedom*

⁶⁶ *Ibid*

flagrant breach of the Aitchison Commission's recommendation about larger employment of Indians in minor Civil Service, made far back in the previous decade.

Before the Lahore Congress, Surendranath set out on a tour of the Punjab at the invitation of Lala Jaishi Ram, an eminent Congressman who died soon after. He toured Delhi, Amritsar, Lahore and Rawalpindi, delivering a number of addresses at all these places.

The turn of the century gave a fresh, fiery impetus to nationalism, especially in Bengal where dissatisfaction with what has been described by some as the political mendicancy of the Congress started brewing in the writings of men like Bipinchandra Pal, and otherwise. In the background of the previous years' plague, famine and privation, the discontent grew increasingly bitter and was threatening to burst the bounds. Several other events added a fresh fervour to nationalism, viz., the rise of Japan as an Asiatic power and the successful Chinese boycott of American goods. An Asian consciousness was surging up. Asia is one, said Okakura. Already Swami Vivekananda's successful mission in America had roused in India a new sense of national pride, not unmixed with religious fervour.

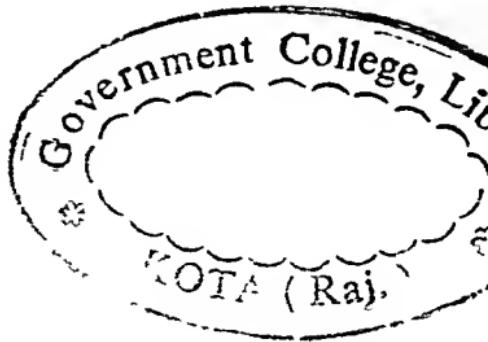
At this juncture the reactionary rule of Lord Curzon came to serve as a lever for nationalism, as we shall presently see. The eclipse of self-government in the Calcutta Corporation was only the first inglorious feather in Lord Curzon's cap; more were to follow and the crowning of them all was the Partition of Bengal. It did not take long for the storm to break.

Meanwhile, in February 1904, Surendranath's *Bengalee*, a weekly paper till then, was converted into a daily in response to the demands of an expanding public life and a growing news-hunger. Needless to say, the *Bengalee* became a very powerful organ of public opinion and held

up high standards of journalism. Through the columns of his newspaper, Surendranath pleaded passionately for Indian nationalism and waged a ceaseless battle against all encroachments on the Indians' liberty of action and speech. As editor he shed lustre upon his office. During his forty years' association with the newspaper, Surendranath developed certain journalistic principles and codes of conduct which are as valuable today as they were then. Political life is never free from abuse or attacks, and Surendranath had to face a plethora of them. But he never liked to pay back or hit below the belt. His attitude towards his antagonists was fair and impartial. He would never allow himself to lapse into narrow grooves, personal or provincial.

In his autobiography Surendranath says that he wrote very strongly when occasion demanded but avoided sedition, libel and personal recrimination. He was never charged with sedition, although some of his writings in the *Bengalee* might have been in the border land of sedition. But he also feels that an editor cannot entirely avoid libels. Sometimes in sheer public interest he has to write libellous things and face the consequences. The British rulers of those days used to complain of strong writings in the press. But, Surendranath says, they forgot the provocations they themselves gave for such writings. Here he tells the story of the second contempt case in which he was involved although he was not personally responsible for the offence. It was a much later event. In May 1911, some editorial comments appeared in the *Bengalee* upon the evidence given by the Magistrate of Midnapore in a pending case. It was written by Kalinath Ray, then a sub-editor of the *Bengalee*, who later rose to be distinguished editor of the *Tribune*. Although Ray wrote officially to Surendranath owning the responsibility for the

comments, Surendranath was too broad-minded to allow this to be brought before the Court and, in his written statement, he assumed responsibility as the Editor of the paper. The case, however, fell through on certain technical grounds.



CHAPTER XIII

PRESIDENT OF THE AHMEDABAD CONGRESS

The next crowning event of Surendranath's life was his election for the second time as President of the Ahmedabad Session of the Indian National Congress in 1902. In reply to D. E. Wacha's invitation Surendranath at first suggested the name of Kalicharan Banerjee for Presidentship, but, at the insistence of the Reception Committee, he had to accept the honour himself. At his Simultala residence for six weeks he quietly prepared another classic presidential address which he delivered for two hours to a gathering of over four thousand people, and as usual without consulting any written notes.

The Ahmedabad Session was a tremendous success. The Delhi Durbar was to have been held within nine days of the Congress, that is, on January 1, 1903. Coming close on the heels of the outgoing lean and famished years, the holding of the Durbar was considered nothing short of extravagance despite the Viceregal assertion to the contrary. These costly ceremonial shows had become familiar features of imperial rule in India. They were held in 1858, 1877 and 1887. In view of the Durbar in the offing, Surendranath's presence in the presidential chair was considered essential, so as to render the Congress platform more attractive than the Durbar and also to project the Congress point of view more forcefully. The session was fittingly described as the Coronation Congress. Proposing Surendranath's name to the chair, P.M. Mehta said that the Coronation required a President who could represent the Congress viewpoint with statesman-

ship, ability and force. And who could discharge these duties better, he asked, than Surendranath, "the man who has devoted his life to the cause of the Congress, who has never swerved from his duty to the people's cause and who has always been ready to undertake any work for those who come to him."

The session, the first to be held at Ahmedabad, created a tremendous enthusiasm among the people of Gujarat—merchants, traders, the educated middle class and others. An industrial exhibition was also held as an adjunct to the Congress, of which the opening ceremony was presided over by the Gaikwad of Baroda. Associating industrial exhibitions with Congress sessions had become a vogue for some time, in introducing which Surendranath had played no mean part. The holding of the exhibition coalesced with the mood and temper of the enterprising people of Gujarat and gave an impetus to the industrial resurgence which flowed from that part of the country.

An exuberant and overwhelming reception awaited Surendranath as President of the Ahmedabad Congress. "All Gujarat seemed to be on the *qui vive* to give not only a cordial but most enthusiastic welcome", says the Congress Report for the year. Gujarat had never received "so distinguished a countryman" in its districts nor had listened to "his stirring oratory". The whole of Ahmedabad was, therefore, in a state of eager expectation. The luxuriously decorated streets wore a gala look and were packed with eager crowds to every inch of space, as if some Prince or Viceroy was going to be received. The arrival of the President was a signal for a tremendous rush. Garlands, bouquets, rosewater and other perfumes were in requisition. "It is no exaggeration to say", goes on the report, "that Mr. Surendranath literally bowed under monster garlands which adorned

him". "To give anything like a vivid description of the scene all throughout the different roads is impossible", it adds. While he was thus being led in a procession through the swelling, seething sea of humanity to the place where he was to be honoured, the volunteers' almost wild enthusiasm burst all bounds and, despite Surendranath's strong protestation, they unyoked the horses and themselves physically dragged the President's carriage to the destination. There, at their insistence, Surendranath had to speak a few words giving them a foretaste of his address which was to follow. It did not fall to the lot of many Congress leaders of those days to receive such an exuberant reception.

Though a constitutional agitator, Surendranath had all the makings and responses of a mass leader. This aspect of his personality came into bold relief during the Partition of Bengal agitation which enthroned him in the people's heart as an "uncrowned king". Like the mass leaders of the later era, Gandhiji, Subhas and Nehru, he too was electrified by contact with the people, by the exhibition of popular fervour. If Gujarat gave him such a splendid reception, he too rose admirably to the occasion and made a moving gesture. In his emotion-packed thanksgiving address at the end of the session, he said: "There are moments in the life-time of a man when the resources of language fail him to give adequate expression to the sentiments which are uppermost in his mind. One of those moments has now arrived for me. I confess I do not know how adequately to express to you the deep-seated feeling of gratitude which has inspired me at this moment for your abounding kindness to me... I am not so foolish or so vain as to imagine for one moment that the honour was a personal demonstration. The honour was to the representative of the Congress... In honouring the

President you make your salutations to the genius of the Congress...you have proclaimed to the people of India with the trumpet blast that the one creed and the one object of your worship in the political field is the creed of the Congress".⁶⁷

The presidential address showed a masterly grasp and comprehension of the current political problems, of their many complexities. It began with a reference to the Delhi Durbar. Surendranath did not denounce the Durbar, bell, book and candle, as extremist opinion might perhaps like to do, because he knew that notwithstanding criticism and protests, the Durbar had become a *fait accompli*. He, therefore, made it an occasion for pressing for concessions towards enlarging the popular rights. "The time has passed", he said, "when a mere pageant calculated to dazzle and to astonish can leave an enduring impression upon the public mind of India... The Durbar needs to be consecrated by the touch of a higher statesmanship".⁶⁸ The show and pageantry would be swept off the current of history. But any concession towards the people's enfranchisement, towards the enlargement of their rights, would become a permanent possession. That was his plea.

Was India growing poorer day by day? Posing this vital question, Surendranath demanded an enquiry into the economic conditions of the country. Similar enquiries had been held twice before—during the Viceroyalty of Lord Ripon and Lord Dufferin. The confidential nature of those enquiries and the non-publication of their reports raised strong presumption against a "roseate" view of the situation, a presumption which was strengthened by the

⁶⁷ Congress Report, 1902

⁶⁸ *Ibid*

Government's steady refusal to hold a fresh enquiry. Quoting facts and statistics from official and pro-official sources, Surendranath brought to the fore the staggering poverty of the Indian masses. Six famines occurring in the previous two decades had taken a toll of nearly fifteen million lives (twenty-six million, according to another estimate). If this had happened in any European country, the conscience of mankind would have been shocked. "But India is beyond the pale of civilized opinion". This large-scale famine mortality did not rouse the conscience even of her rulers.

This was severe enough condemnation of the British rulers. Surendranath strongly refuted the official explanation that famines were due to droughts. Droughts occurred in other countries too but not famines. According to Surendranath, "destitution is the main cause of Indian famines".⁶⁹ People were "absolutely resourceless, sunk in the deepest depths of poverty, living from hand to mouth, often starving upon one meal a day, and they die in their thousands and hundreds of thousands at the first stress of scarcity...".⁷⁰ Surendranath's remedies were: (1) moderate assessment of land-tax, (2) remission of taxes which pressed heavily upon the people, (3) stoppage of the economic drain and (4) revival of the country's old industries and starting the new ones.

Several resolutions passed at the Congress were based on the points made by Surendranath in his presidential speech. These included one on the need for holding an early enquiry into the economic conditions of the people.

Industrial revival had been one of the most important points in Surendranath's economic blueprint and one on

⁶⁹ *Congress Report, 1902*

⁷⁰ *Ibid*

which he never tired of putting the utmost stress. In his Ahmedabad address he quoted profusely from European and Indian authorities to prove how India's indigenous industries had been completely crippled in unfair competition with the British manufactures and how Britain wanted India to remain doomed to the position of a mere producer of raw materials. The salvation of India lay in an industrial revival. "If the country is to be saved", he said, "we must leave the beaten track of the services and the professions and be the pioneers and organizers of a vast industrial movement..."⁷¹ And then there was the terrific drain, at the rate of £30 million a year, during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century—a distinct loss of national wealth and resources.

For this economic malaise the remedy was a political one. "Give the people a potential voice over the control of the public expenditure, and the revival of the economy will follow as surely as the night follows the day".⁷² He, therefore, urged further expansion of the Councils, both local and imperial, with larger popular representation and armed with control over public expenditure. That way alone, he felt, could the country's economic health be restored.

Another problem of considerable public importance which Surendranath dealt with at length was the educational policy of the Government of Lord Curzon. On assumption of the Chancellorship of the Calcutta University and again in his convocation address to the same University in 1900, Lord Curzon vaguely hinted at his ideas and intentions so far as Indian education was concerned. His impression seemed to have been that the

⁷¹ *Congress Report, 1902*

⁷² *Ibid*

educational system was faulty and that the Government had supreme responsibility in setting it right. These vaguely adumbrated ideas found a concrete shape in the secret Simla Conference of 1902 on the subject, to which not a single Indian was invited and whose deliberations were kept a closely guarded secret. Even Lovat Fraser, an apologist for Lord Curzon in many ways, says that the constitution of the Conference, though not its privacy, was open to criticism.⁷³ Surendranath, however, criticised the privacy maintained in respect of the Conference and its deliberations. He contended that no useful purpose would be served by investing educational problems with a quasi-political character and raising them to the level of state secrets.

The Conference was followed by the appointment of a Universities Commission presided over by Sir Thomas Raleigh, the then Vice-Chancellor of the Calcutta University. The Commission originally had only a single Indian member on it, Syed Hussain Bilgrami of the Nizam's dominions. But his representative character was questioned by the Muslims themselves. As a result of the vigorous protests in the columns of the *Bengalee* and elsewhere, Justice Gurudas Banerjee was subsequently included in the Commission. The report was completed in haste, in about five months' time, whereas the Education Commission of 1882 had taken nearly eighteen months to complete its labours. On the basis of the report of the Commission, the Universities Act of 1904 was passed. The Government did not concur with all the recommendations of the Commission. Nevertheless, the Commission's report convulsed the educated classes all over the country.

⁷³ *India Under Curzon and After*

The setting up of the Commission was regarded as one more reactionary measure of Lord Curzon's rule which aimed at crippling the cause of education in India. The Congress strongly criticised it. Gokhale and Surendranath led the attack against it. In a resolution adopted at its Ahmedabad session, the Congress took strong exception to the recommendations of the Commission about the abolition of second grade colleges, ban on their future affiliation, the fixing of minimum rates of fees by the Syndicate, monopoly of legal instruction by central law colleges, the licensing of secondary education by making schools dependent upon recognition by the Director of Public Instruction, and officialisation of the Senates and the Syndicates and reducing the universities to the status of Government departments. The Congress adopted a similar resolution in 1903 on the Universities Bill stating that the Bill, if passed into law, would have "the effect of restricting the area of education and completely destroying the independence of the Universities."⁷⁴

In his presidential address Surendranath said that the recommendations of the Education Commission were calculated to reverse the spirit of the Education Despatch of 1854, which was wider spread of education, and of the 1882 Education Commission's report, which was to encourage private efforts in the field of education. The proposed reforms were intended to bring about efficiency in the sphere of education. But, according to Surendranath, educational efficiency was best secured by improving the efficiency of the teacher. Once the status of the teacher was raised, his calling elevated and dignified, and men were drawn to the teaching profession who looked upon it as self-dedication to a sacred, heaven-appointed

⁷⁴How India Wrought for Freedom

task, "you will not need Commissions and Committees, Reports and Regulations, to secure the efficiency of our Universities and the advancement of learning".⁷⁵ "The names of great teachers", he went on to say, "form landmarks in the educational history of this country. They have done more for the cause of education than all the Resolutions, all the Regulations, all the fine maxims and even all the pious aspirations which have emanated from responsible authority".⁷⁶ This was eloquent enough condemnation of the Government's educational policy.

The apologists of Lord Curzon have pointed out that the Viceroy's spectacular debut into the field of educational reform was justified by the realities of the situation. Education, they contend, had fallen into disarray and had become mechanical and perverted. Politicians, it was alleged, had infiltrated into the university bodies. It has been contended on the other hand that when a rapid expansion of education was a pressing necessity, private effort had to play a significant role. If in the process, some slackness crept into educational administration, this was no argument against private initiative in the field. To nationalist India Lord Curzon's educational policy seemed to be a calculated effort to control political resurgence by controlling education which supplied the motive force behind it. The policy savoured of official suspicion of education and of educated India. It was particularly harsh on the spread of legal education. The legal profession, it may be noted, was the nursery of political leadership.

Surendranath concluded his address with a grand peroration on the Congress and its mission, its achieve-

⁷⁵ *Congress Report, 1902*

⁷⁶ *Ibid*

ments and failures. its constitutional struggle for liberty, and expression of his unflinching faith that the Congress would ultimately achieve its goal. "For myself, I believe", he said, "the Congress has a divine mission". Doubtless, there had been delays, disappointments and trials. The cause of progress had met with temporary set-backs. For the moment the Congress had been worsted. "The forces of reaction are now in the ascendant". "But we Congressmen never confess to a defeat".

The presidential address was full of scathing criticism of the Government policies, administrative, educational and economic. There was no effort in it to extenuate or minimize. It was a straightforward attack which no Government would relish. The speech, however, also bore the unmistakable evidence of the liberal Congress leaders' loyal adherence to the Empire, their almost obsessive faith that, conscious of their own glorious traditions, the Englishmen themselves would help India attain her goal. He said: "It is England which has created in us those political aspirations the fruition of which we now claim ... Englishmen must accept the consequences of their own policy—they must cheerfully face the results which are the outcome of their own beneficent administration...we have no higher aspiration than that we should be admitted into the great confederacy of self-governing states of which England is the august mother".⁷⁷ This was an outspoken enunciation of liberal faith which eventually proved a battle-ground for the old nationalism and the new and led to an irreparable breach between the two.

With the passing of the Universities Act, Surendranath made over his proprietary right over the Ripon College to a body of trustees. He was now free to go about collect-

ing funds for a building for the same. He was able to secure substantial government help through the good offices of the liberal-minded Lieutenant-Governors, Sir Edward Baker and Sir William Duke, who supported the cause of education. Surendranath had to bid good-bye to educational work later in life, and this he did with a good deal of regret. Throughout his autobiography there are warm and wistful references to his career as an educationist. He remembers that he was accused of diffusing political ideas among the students. But he claims that he disseminated only the right kind of political ideas. Throughout his life he had preached patriotism coupled with orderly constitutional progress. If, however, students had come later to believe in other methods, the seeds of revolutionary principles, he feels, were rooted in the economic and political conditions of the day, and to no small extent in the reactionary policies pursued by the rulers themselves. Against such a development he had also been giving frequent warnings.

Under the new Universities Act he became a member of the Senate of the Calcutta University. Previous to this a modified election to the Senate was allowed, but the candidature was confined only to those who had graduated in or before 1867. Why that particular date-line was selected was mystifying. According to one interpretation, its purpose was to exclude Surendranath whose year of graduation was 1868.

In 1901 he ceased to be a member of the Bengal Legislative Council but stood for the Imperial Legislative Council. His rival was the then Maharaja of Darbhanga. There was a tie between them—each counting five votes and the matter went up to the Government of India. The Government under Lord Curzon did nothing about it within two months of the polling, as it was required to do.

under the regulations, but ordered a re-election only after three months had lapsed, when Surendranath had ceased to be a member of the Bengal Council and could not record his own vote in his favour.

CHAPTER XIV

PARTITION, BOYCOTT AND SWADESHI

It was the agitation following the Partition of Bengal which saw Surendranath at the height of his popularity and installed him as an uncrowned King. Lord Curzon's reactionary rule reached its climax in the Partition of Bengal, a division of a compact and homogeneous people passionately proud of their unity and culture. True, the Indian provinces had grown up haphazardly as the British imperial sway advanced. They had no rationale behind them either linguistic or cultural or ethnic or, in some cases, even administrative. From that point of view, a redefinition of provincial boundaries on scientific principles was not unwelcome. In fact the Congress itself had been fighting for it since the beginning of the present century. But the Partition of Bengal was not a linguistic or ethnic redefinition of provinces. It was tantamount to cutting into two a living, vibrating homogeneous whole.

In 1871 Assam was separated from Bengal with three Bengali-speaking districts attached to it and put under a Chief Commissioner. Public opinion in Bengal was at that time too weak to assert itself against the transference of the Bengali-speaking districts to Assam. In the nineties of the last century, the need of affording greater protection to the north-east frontier suggested to the authorities further territorial additions to the new province by including in it the Chittagong Division of Bengal. This however met with public opposition and was shelved for the time being. It was left to the Government of Lord Curzon to revive the idea in December 1903 with the

entire Chittagong Division and two districts of the Dacca Division added to the proposed new province of East Bengal and Assam, to be made a Lieutenant-Governor's province. To add insult to injury, it was announced that the new province was also to include six districts of North Bengal. The official explanation was that Bengal was too big a charge for a single Lieutenant-Governor and that the proposed changes were in the interest of administrative efficiency of which Lord Curzon was a great votary. To nationalist Bengal, the announcement came as a stunning blow aimed at breaking the back of the Bengali people and eventually of the spirit of renaissance which, originating from Bengal, was sweeping the rest of the country. It was again a master strategy of divide and rule, seeking to set off the predominantly Muslim province of East Bengal and Assam against the predominantly Hindu province of Bengal.

In its mysterious way of working, history often brings out unexpected good through an apparent evil, and this happened in the case of the Partition. Bengal was stirred to its very depths. All sections of the people including Muslims expressed their indignant opposition to the splitting up of their homeland. Between December 1903 and October 1905 there were more than 2,000 public meetings attended by gatherings ranging between 500 and 50,000. A Calcutta meeting held in March 1905 openly censured the Viceroy. Sensing the feeling among the people, the Government started conciliating public opinion. A series of conferences was held at the Belvedere under the chairmanship of the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Andrew Fraser, to which the leaders of East Bengal were invited. Lord Curzon himself went out to East Bengal and canvassed support for his scheme, particularly among the Muslims. He was partly successful. The hope of Muslim ascendancy in the

new province which the Viceroy held forth as a tempting bait induced certain sections of the Muslims gradually to secede from the anti-Partition movement. But there were others among them who remained unrecruited. Hundreds of memorials were submitted to the Government of India as well as to the Secretary of State. One of them contained 70,000 signatures of Hindus as well as Muslims from East Bengal.

Having failed to persuade the leaders, the Government now adopted a policy of the strictest secrecy. For a time there was such a lull in regard to the matter that the scheme seemed to have been as good as abandoned. All of a sudden, however, on July 20, 1905, the announcement of the Partition fell like a bombshell upon a bewildered public who felt insulted, tricked and betrayed. On October 16, 1905, the Partition became a *fait accompli* and on November 18, Lord Curzon left the shores of India.

The shady tactics of secrecy through which the Government sought to circumvent public opposition were thus commented upon in Surendranath's *Bengalee* : "The authorities deliberated in secret, consulted in secret and decided in secret without the smallest reference to the millions of people whose interests would be vitally affected by the proposals. Never was there a more outrageous contempt of public opinion than what has been shown by Lord Curzon and Sir Andrew Fraser in these proceedings. But let not the Government lay the flatteringunction to its soul that the country will acquiesce in these monstrous proceedings without a strenuous and persistent struggle..."⁷⁵

The Partition decision evoked the widest possible pub-

⁷⁵ *Bengalee*, Editorial captioned "A Grave National Disaster", August 7, 1905

lic disapprobation and indignation. Even Anglo-Indian newspapers like the *Statesman* and the *Englishman* condemned it. The atmosphere was one of acute discontent and great tension. It was felt that something more tangible than mere holding of public meetings, passing resolutions and submitting petitions was now needed. It was in such an atmosphere that the idea of the boycott of British goods came before the public and had an immediate electrifying effect—in Calcutta as well as in the districts. Who exactly was the originator of the idea is difficult to say with exactitude. Surendranath thinks that several people might have mooted it simultaneously. According to others it was Krishnakumar Mitra, an eminent patriotic worker of Bengal and Editor of the Bengali weekly *Sanjeebam* who suggested in the columns of his paper the boycott of British goods as the most fitting reply to the dismemberment of the province.⁷⁹ The purpose of Mitra was to draw official attention to the gross injustice, to stop the enormous imports of British goods into the country and at the same time to stimulate Indian industrial growth.

The boycott and *Swadeshi* movement was formally ushered in at a public protest meeting held at the Town Hall in Calcutta on August 7, 1905. The resolution was moved by Narendranath Sen, the famous editor of the *Indian Mirror*, and supported by Surendranath. It synchronised with the prevailing national temper in the industrial field. India's industrial helplessness and the dying out of her ancient and honourable trades had already become painfully palpable to the Congress leaders. The Congress had already initiated the practice of holding industrial exhibitions along with its annual sessions with a view to giving a boost to Indian industries. Surendranath has always played an important part in rousing an industri-

⁷⁹ *History of Indian Association and Indian National Evolution*

consciousness through the Congress platforms. Already in several meetings held in the districts of Bengal people had expressed their determination to boycott British goods and adopt Swadeshi.

On the eve of the momentous meeting of August 7, the *Bengalee* in an editorial said: "As we had predicted so it has come to pass. Our countrymen have commenced a vigorous agitation against the Partition of Bengal. It may lead to nothing, the blow may not be averted; but the moral gain will be immense... we are resolved to convert a catastrophe into a moral victory of the first magnitude..."⁵⁰ After the Town Hall meeting the *Bengalee* wrote thus: "We only wish Lord Curzon and Sir Andrew Fraser were present to witness the sorrow and indignation which the Partition of Bengal has evoked throughout the province... it is evident that we are entering upon a new phase of agitation. We have prayed and protested in countless meetings, but the Government will not listen to us. In view of the contumacious treatment of public opinion by the Indian Government, we have been forced to inaugurate a policy of passive resistance... Bengal is in mourning."⁵¹

These editorial comments show Surendranath as a fiery patriot who did not hesitate, when occasion arose, to take to the path of passive resistance. A boycott movement of the kind initiated in the wake of the Partition had never been attempted before; it was a pioneering, and in a sense revolutionary, concept. And Surendranath became a rallying point of afflicted Bengal's eloquent protest. If the Chinese could successfully boycott American goods, why could not the Indians do so in the case of British goods? The movement anticipated the far greater mass movement later under Gandhiji.

⁵⁰ "The Town Hall Meeting" Editorial, August 4, 1905

⁵¹ "The Town Hall Meeting". Editorial, August 10, 1905

The resolution at the August 7 meeting read thus : "This meeting fully sympathises with the resolutions adopted at many meetings held in the mofussil to abstain from the purchase of British manufactures so long as the Partition Resolution is not withdrawn, as a protest against the indifference of the British public in regard to Indian affairs and the consequent disregard of Indian public opinion by the present Government."

The boycott was thus intended to be a temporary affair; it was to last only till the Partition Resolution was in force. The sponsors including Surendranath were anxious that the movement did not put on a racial overtone and in particular did not antagonise India's sincere friends among Englishmen.

With the ushering in of the movement, Surendranath devoted himself indefatigably to the cause so dear to him, went on addressing meeting after meeting and exhorting the people, the students and the youth in particular, to take up passionately the cause of *swadeshi*. Indeed, the movement once again became "an over-mastering passion" of his life and claimed from him a complete dedication to the cause. The enthusiasm of the youth had risen to the highest pitch. They hawked *swadeshi* goods, picketed shops dealing in foreign goods and counselled their countrymen on the virtues of *swadeshi*. Many of them gave up their studies, especially those in Government institutions. At home, the women took to *swadeshi* even more enthusiastically. Even children were deeply touched. Surendranath tells the story of a five year-old grand-daughter of his who refused to accept from a relative the presentation of a pair of foreign shoes. He also tells the story (heard from an eminent doctor of those days) how a little girl

patient of his cried out in her delirium that she would not take any foreign medicine.

The movement was many-sided, touching the three principal aspects of life, economic, educational and political. On the economic side, it led to a significant industrial resurgence in Bengal and elsewhere in the country. In the educational sphere, the boycott resulted in the formation of the National Council of Education with which Surendranath was closely associated. It was, as Surendranath himself says, synchronous with the national awakening itself which had come in the wake of the Indian National Congress. It touched with a new creative energy every principal aspect of Bengal's life, including the culture. Rabindranath Tagore was an impassioned bard of the new national spirit.

October 16, 1905, the fateful day on which the Partition took effect, was observed all over Bengal as a day of national mourning. On that day the people in their thousands observed fast, did penance and tied round each other's wrist red bands (*rakhi*) symbolising unbreakable brotherly unity. In the afternoon of the same day, on Surendranath's suggestion, the foundation-stone was laid of the Federation Hall which, in the event of the Partition not being undone, would remain a symbol of united Bengal. To preside over the function, the ailing leader, Anandamohan Bose, was brought in an invalid's chair. Later, at another public meeting, a national fund was raised at the initiative of Surendranath with a view to helping the weavers. Surendranath accompanied by his colleagues went on untiringly addressing meeting after meeting; at many of these the admirers touched his feet and at many again he had to be rescued with difficulty from the rush and stampede of the admiring crowd. Surendranath was, as it were, a living symbol of the newly awakened *swadeshi* spirit.

Taking alarm at the unprecedented mass uphcaval, the Government let loose its engine of repression upon the people. But it helped only to strengthen the movement. The Government issued circulars urging the school and college authorities to prevent the students from taking part in boycott and picketting or otherwise participating in the movement, in default of which they were threatened with various penalties. Among the many restrictive circulars was one issued by the new Government of East Bengal, declaring illegal the public shouting of *Bande Mataram*. Some all-knowing British official had, in his supreme wisdom, discovered that the simple, innocent patriotic hymn of Bankim was an invocation to Goddess Kali for wreaking vengeance! But bureaucratic prohibition could not suppress the song; it only helped it attain the status of a national anthem even before the attainment of independence. Meanwhile, however, the Partition became a "settled fact" at least for the time being, as repeatedly emphasised by the Government. How it came to be "unsettled" later is a subsequent story.

Though a provincial affair, the Partition of Bengal became a national issue and evoked sympathetic response all over India. The Congress generally did not concern itself with provincial questions. But the Partition was regarded as a national question of grave significance. Could not the fate of Bengal overtake any other province? "Thus the Parsi, the Maratha, the Madrasi, the Sindhi and the Punjabi rose as one man with the Bengali to undo the settled fact".⁸² "The cause of Bengal was made India's cause".⁸³ As early as in 1903, when the Partition proposals had just been mooted, and later in 1904, when they were before the public, the Congress adopted resolutions

⁸² Indian National Evolution

⁸³ History of the Congress, Dr. Sitaramayya

strongly opposing them. Presiding over the Varanasi session of the Congress in 1905, Gokhale said: "The tremendous upheaval of popular feeling which has taken place in Bengal in consequence of the Partition will constitute a landmark in the history of our national progress... the public life of this country has received an accession of strength of great importance and for this all India owes a deep debt of gratitude to Bengal".⁸⁴ Moving the resolution against the Partition of Bengal at the Congress, Surendranath declared that the agitation should never stop until the Partition was annulled. Gokhale fully justified boycott as a political weapon to be used in the last resort and lent his eloquent support to *swadeshi*. The Congress adopted the resolution against the Partition and condemned the repressive measures of the Government.

At the Calcutta session of the Congress the following year resolutions were again adopted against the Partition, declaring the boycott movement as legitimate and giving cordial support to the *swadeshi* movement. The Partition resolution was moved by a Muslim, Nawab Khaja Atikulla of Dacca, who pleaded for joint Hindu-Muslim protest against it. Seconding the resolution in a passionate speech Surendranath said: "Wait we must; what else can we do? Waiting upon the will of our rulers has been our lot... we shall certainly wait but not in meek submission to the will of our rulers as the decree of an inexorable fate, but with the firm resolve to overcome that fate and work out our salvation".⁸⁵ At the next Congress session at Madras in 1908, once again similar resolutions on the Partition and the *swadeshi* movement were adopted. Bengal's problem thus became the problem of all India.

⁸⁴ *How India Wrought for Freedom*:

⁸⁵ *Ibid*

It was not easy for the early liberals of the Congress to accept the idea of boycott because of the supposed spirit of racial exclusiveness associated with it. They accepted it as a legitimate weapon in the last resort and justified its application only so far as Bengal was concerned under the prevailing circumstances. *Swadeshi*, being a less embarrassing idea, was more welcome to them than boycott.

Meanwhile came an incident which added considerably to the prevailing tension and indeed to the acuteness of the situation. The Bengal Provincial Conference was due to be held in April 1906 at Barisal, one of the East Bengal districts affected by the Partition. The shouting of *Bande Mataram* had already been forbidden on the streets of Barisal in common with other East Bengal towns. Surendranath and his fellow delegates came to know on their arrival at Barisal that the authorities had forced the local leaders, sponsors of the conference, to give an undertaking that *Bande Mataram* would not be shouted while welcoming the delegates. This was revolting to Surendranath and his colleagues and particularly to the younger sections of the delegates. However, by a compromise it was decided that there should be no bar to shouting *Bande Mataram* on all other occasions except while welcoming the delegates.

The procession of delegates, all agog with *swadeshi* excitement, started with Surendranath, Motilal Ghosh, editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, and Bhupendranath Basu in the front line. They were asked to proceed in a most peaceful and unprovocative manner. For a time, the procession proceeded unmolested. But the moment the younger delegates joined the procession, the police attack began, even though they had not till then uttered the cry of *Bande Mataram*. The police lathis fell heavily

on them, indiscriminate and pell-mell, and blood was shed for the sake of the motherland. It was a wanton assault on a peaceful assembly without any provocation whatsoever. But repression strengthened determination. At every stroke of the police lathi the processionists lustily shouted *Bande Mataram* and faced the assault with the imperturbable calm of seasoned passive resisters. Coming by the Police Superintendent, Kemp, Surendranath asked him why he was beating the processionists and said: "If they have done anything I am the person to be punished. I am responsible. Arrest me if you like". He was arrested. When others came forward to offer themselves for arrest, Kemp said that his instructions were "to arrest Mr. Banerjea alone".

Surendranath was taken to the room of the Magistrate, Mr. Emerson. As he was going to take his seat on a chair, the Magistrate rudely objected to a prisoner taking his seat before him. Surendranath replied that he had not come to be insulted by the Magistrate and that he expected to be treated with courtesy and consideration. At this Surendranath was asked to apologise, which he refused to do. The angry Magistrate at once charged him with contempt of court and fined him Rs. 200 and subsequently the same sum again for the police case for breaking the law. The fines having been paid, Surendranath was free to come back to the conference.

The conference *pandal* was in a state of wild excitement because of the ruthless assault on the procession. Not being satisfied with beating the processionists, the police had caught hold of a young man named Chittaranjan Guha Thakurta and after giving him a merciless beating, had thrown him into a tank full of water. The conference ended by adopting a resolution condemning the repressive policy of the East Bengal Government.

Next day, as the conference was going on, the police came and told its President, Abdul Rasul, that the conference was prohibited by a Government order. Despite bitter indignation at the wrongful order, the delegates ultimately decided to submit to the bureaucratic fiat. A literary conference, to attend which poet Rabindranath Tagore had come down from Calcutta, was also abandoned. Throughout these exciting times and events the people showed a remarkable sense of discipline and restraint. It was a unique experiment in passive resistance.

The police beating of peaceful processionists and the forcible dispersal of the conference were the climax of the policy of repression of the new Government of East Bengal under Sir Bampfylde Fuller. What was worse, communal poison was being sedulously spread. There was deliberate oppression of honoured members of the Hindu community by the military police. Occupying the august position of a Governor, Sir Bampfylde cut an ugly joke saying that, of his two wives, the Hindu and the Mohammadan, the latter was his favourite.

On the following day Surendranath attended an anti-Partition meeting a few miles away in the interior of Barisal, without interference by the police party which arrived there too late for the meeting. After that he left for Calcutta. At every station where the steamer or the train touched, there were wild and animated scenes of crowds thronging to catch a glimpse of Surendranath. For days together he had no rest or sleep: his voice had become hoarse with incessant public speaking. At all these meetings he administered the *swadeshi* vow, which he himself had devised earlier, embodying the people's determination to patronize indigenous articles and to abstain from using foreign goods. On arrival in Calcutta, he once again addressed a public meeting amidst tremendous enthusiasm

urging the people to carry on the anti-Partition agitation with firm determination. Surendranath says: "There are always moments in the lives of men that are worth living for. For me this was one of such moments".⁸⁶ This was the crowning consummation of his political career.

⁸⁶ *A Nation in Making*

CHAPTER XV

RISE OF EXTREMISM

As the storm of the anti-Partition movement went on raging, grave and disquieting symptoms of popular restiveness started making their appearance. The revolutionary cult had its powerful sway upon the mind of young Bengal. The weekly *Jugantar* was preaching the cult of revolution. *Bande Mataram*, first edited by Bipinchandra Pal and then by Aurobindo Ghosh, preached extremism and absolute autonomy. *Sandhya*, the Bengali daily of Bramhabandhav Upadhyaya, spoke in strong terms. The Government let loose its machinery of repression at full speed. The extremist papers were penalised, eminent *swadeshi* leaders were deported without trial under the obsolete Regulation III of 1818. Even Surendranath might have been deported had it not been for the last-moment intervention of Sir Edward Baker, who had by then become the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal and who knew Surendranath well. In 1908 the Muzaffarpur bomb outrage took place, leading to the execution of Khudiram Bose and the self-immolation of Prafulla Chaki. It was followed by the discovery of the Muraripukur conspiracy and trial. The mood and temper of the times are typified in an incident Surendranath describes in his autobiography. One evening, a few months after the Barisal Conference, two young men sought a private interview with him at his Barrackpore residence and asked his advice about their plan of shooting Sir Bampfylde Fuller, Lieutenant-Governor of East Bengal. They wanted to take revenge as the soldiers stationed at Banaripara in Barisal had been committing outrage upon some of the

womenfolk. It was with difficulty that Surendranath could dissuade them from the dangerous course.

Though a believer in evolutionary progress, Surendranath had fully realized that recent events had shaken the faith of the youth in constitutional methods and driven them to the desperate path of violence and bloodshed. Though strongly opposed to such methods, he blames them upon the blunders committed by the authorities, their measures of repression in particular. He makes no secret of his conviction that "the Partition of Bengal and the policy that followed it were the root causes of the movement in our province though no doubt they are strengthened by economic conditions."⁵⁷ Intriguingly enough, the new Secretary of State, Lord Morley, who was liberal enough to dislike the Partition, nevertheless accepted it as a "settled fact" and, despite his inherent dislike of repressive measures including deportation without trial, he could hardly prevail over the men on the spot. The policies thus went on unchanged.

Meanwhile dissatisfaction with the Congress method of constitutional agitation was making itself felt even among a section of Congressmen. They not only wanted a change in the technique of struggle but differed from the old school about the goal, about the basic political philosophy. The Partition had produced in them a strong anti-British reaction, in sharp contrast to the liberal Congress leaders' almost unshakable faith in the benefits of British rule. Militant nationalism, which had already manifested itself with the advent of Tilak, now received a new stimulus. The breach between the old nationalism and the new became wide from this time onwards. Whereas the old school still stuck to its firm faith in British

⁵⁷ *A Nation in Making*

professions and British liberalism, the new one had no such illusion and believed that freedom had to be attained by the people's own strength. It believed that the British rulers could never help India attain her goal and that the gifts of that rule, however priceless, could not make up for the fact of political subjugation. The old nationalism found itself unequal to the new surging currents. From the Council halls and conference *pandals*, the political venue was fast shifting to the masses. Politics was ceasing to be an intellectual exercise; it was coming to be the business of the common man.

Tilak was present at Calcutta at the Shivaji festival of 1906 and enthusiastically accepted the anti-Partition programmes of boycott, Swadeshi and national education. He vigorously preached the idea of boycott, a strong political weapon with which the administration run by a handful of Europeans and a multitude of Indians could be paralysed. B. C. Pal would not accept *Swaraj* as a gift, he would acquire it by his own hands. According to Aurobindo Ghosh, the religion of nationalism came from God. He preached passive resistance and self-help as the two effective political weapons. Side by side with the rise of extremism, the underground revolutionary movement went on gaining momentum in the country, in Bengal and the Punjab in particular.

Surendranath was deep in the Partition movement; he was its undisputed leader, the moving spirit behind it. The new trend of extremism and the doctrine of defiance were, however, contrary to his life-long faith. A crucial stage had now been reached in his career.

Things might as well have come to a head at the Calcutta Session of the Congress in 1906. The extremist section wanted to sponsor Tilak's name for the Presidential chair, which was disfavoured by the elder statesmen. An

open rupture was avoided only by persuading Dadabhai, then eightyone years of age, to come all the way from England to preside over the potentially stormy session. Bipin Chandra Pal and Tilak were leading the extremists' assault. The session, which was otherwise a successful one, betrayed sharp internal differences. Chintamani calls it a "most uproarious", "almost rebellious", session.⁵⁵ The psychological gulf had by now become too wide to be bridged. The first official use of the word *Swaraj* in Dadabhai's presidential address, however, captured the imagination of the people and blunted, for the time being, the edge of extremist opposition but could not quell it in the end. The *Swaraj* of Dadabhai's conception was, as he explained in his speech, an India under Indian control, a self-government more or less on colonial lines. But having no faith in the benefit or necessity of British connections, the extremists interpreted this in their own light only to be disillusioned eventually. Indeed the idea of *Swaraj*, even when the cry was being echoed and re-echoed on a thousand lips, remained somewhat vague and indeterminate. The Congress as an organisation accepted the goal of "Purna *Swaraj*" or complete independence only at the Lahore Session in December 1929.

A small incident took place at Midnapore in Bengal only about a month before the Surat Session of the Congress was held in December 1907. The District Political Conference was being held there under the presidency of K. B. Dutt, a well-known leader of the district. Surendranath was present as an invited guest. As the President started speaking, he was repeatedly interrupted and efforts were made to wreck the Conference. It was with difficulty that Surendranath, a most respected leader, succeeded in restoring order and resuming the business of the Confe-

⁵⁵ *Indian Politics since Mutiny*

rence. The disturbers of peace were strongly suspected to have been persons connected with the anarchical movement. To Surendranath this incident came as a revelation. He summed up the situation thus : "The popular faith in constitutional methods was shaken; the young and ardent spirits writhing under disappointment but eager to serve their country were led into the dangerous path of lawlessness and violence unrestrained by the voice of their elders".⁵⁰ Even though basically opposed to extremism in any form, Surendranath primarily blamed the Government for the situation, for creating conditions of heart-breaking disillusionment and for its repressive policy, which together provided a fertile ground for extremism.

What happened at Surat on a far bigger scale only a month later is well known. For Surendranath it was the first major set-back of his political career. His solemn and eloquent voice, which was usually heard from the Congress platform with hushed, respectful silence, failed to command the audience at Surat. The session met in a tense atmosphere. Mrs. Besant says: "The whole country was in a state of turmoil and excitement and the signs of cleavage of the National Party into Right and Left wings ... had grown marked". The storm signal came in the form of a suggestion that Lala Lajpat Rai should be elected President instead of Rashbehari Ghosh, the moderates' candidate. Lala Lajpat Rai, of course, declined the honour. According to Surendranath, there was a strong party in favour of Tilak's election as President. When the name of Ghosh was proposed for Presidentship by Ambalal Desai, there were interruptions. As Surendranath, "the old favourite of the Congress", stood up to second the proposal, the noisy interruptions grew in volume and intensity. The meeting had to be adjourned. The following day,

Surendranath was allowed to complete his unfinished speech, but trouble again arose over Tilak's intended amendment which was ruled out of order by the President. Boisterous scenes broke out. A shoe striking Surendranath on the cheek went off to hit Pherozeshah Mehta both of them had to be escorted out of the pandal. The Congress session had to be adjourned *sine die*. Immediately after this the Bengal delegates met and passed a vote of confidence in Surendranath. As regards the all-India delegates, they called a convention the following day, under the signatures, among others, of Surendranath himself, which was attended by a majority of 900 out of 1600 delegates. It was this convention that defined the Congress objective as the attainment of self-government on colonial lines and within the empire, and also framed a constitution for the Congress. Thus was completed the division of the Congress into two sections, the Moderates and the Extremists.

In the middle of 1908 Tilak was sentenced to six years' transportation. In Bengal a number of highly respected leaders like Ashwinikumar Datta and Krishnakumar Mitra were deported under Regulation III of 1818, even though they had been scrupulously following the constitutional path of agitation and had submitted to police violence peacefully and without demur. Revolutionary activity and repression went hand in hand to create an unprecedented situation in the country. A radical politician, Lord Morley is supposed to have been basically averse to a policy of repression. But his writ did not seem to run with the Government of India thousands of miles away—the reason why in India's constitutional evolution the position of the Secretary of State has often been criticized as anomalous, even unnecessary. Surendranath also said that the Secretary of State's powers should have been transferred to the Government of India under popular safeguards.

In 1908 constitutional reforms proposals, known as the Morley-Minto Scheme, were announced. Among the important features of the scheme were the appointment of an Indian member to the Viceroy's Executive Council, and also to the Provincial Executive Council's as well as to the India Council In London, and the power given to non-official members to move resolutions on public questions and to criticise the Government's policies. In view of the official majority in the Councils, however, no effective control was to be exercised by Indians.

CHAPTER XVI

MORLEY-MINTO REFORMS

The Madras Session of the Congress (1908) put on record "the deep and general" satisfaction with which the Reforms proposals had been received and appreciated "the liberal instalment of Reforms" in the shape of the proposed enlargement of the Legislative Councils, appointment of Indian members to the Executive Councils and other aspects. It expressed the hope, however, that the details would be worked out in a liberal spirit.

Moving the resolution Surendranath said that the days when the Indians had asked for a little expansion of the Legislative Councils had gone, that there was a widespread feeling in Bengal about the uselessness of constitutional agitation, that the Partition had not till then been annulled; but he "still clung to constitutional means". Why? Because he felt that under the Reforms, it would be possible to do something at least, however small it might be. He cited an instance. In Bengal nine respectable citizens had been deported without an opportunity for self-defence or explanation having been given to them. Under the proposed Reforms, it would at least be possible to challenge such actions of the Government in the Council. But he cautioned that it was the rules framed under the scheme which could make or mar it.

In 1909 a gloomier Congress met at Lahore and expressed partial disappointment over the regulations framed under the Reforms Scheme—regulations which marred the fine spirit animating the Reforms proposal. What disappointed the Congress most was the introduction of the

principle of communal electorates and the gross and undisguised weightage in favour of the Muslims.

The Congress resolution on the subject strongly criticised "the unjust, invidious and humiliating distinctions between Muslim and non-Muslim subjects of his Majesty". Moving the resolution, Surendranath regretted that the rules and regulations framed under the India Councils Act of 1909 had practically wrecked the Reforms Scheme as originally conceived and added : "Who wrecked the scheme? Who converted that promising experiment into a dismal failure? The responsibility rests upon the shoulders of bureaucracy. Is the bureaucracy having its revenge upon us for the part we have played in securing these concessions"?⁶⁰ He strongly disapproved of the creation of separate electorates, criticised the restrictions on eligibility and exposed the fine fiction of non-official majority. In his reminiscences he has described the Reforms as "a small advance". "Nobody in India was under the delusion that they meant very much".

All through the pioneers of the Congress movement had been trying to build up a united Indian nationality without any distinction between one community and another. It was they who laid the foundation of what was destined later to become a secular state. Naturally they were greatly disappointed when separatism was sought to be implanted in the country's nascent constitution.

Surendranath shared this faith in a united Indian nationality. Right from the beginning of his career he had been stressing the community of interests between the Muslims and the Hindus. A few months before the birth of the Congress in 1885, the *Bengalee* in an editorial article wrote thus : "It is with pleasure we notice that the

⁶⁰ *How India Wrought for Freedom*

Government of India has directed its attention to the question of the advancement of our Mohommedan fellow-countrymen. We have always held—and we have as yet seen no reason to modify our opinion—that the advancement of India means not merely the advancement of the Hindus or of the Mohomedans but the advancement of both these communities in knowledge, in culture and in those higher qualities which contribute to national greatness.³¹ Praising the Mughal rule as just and benevolent on the whole, the article pleaded for forgetting whatever bitterness had been generated between the two communities at a later phase of the same. In 1896, he regretted in the columns of the *Bengalee* the National Mohomedan Association's decision not to take part in the National Congress deliberations.

Throughout his autobiography there are regretful references to Hindu-Muslim disunity and to the introduction of communal electorates in India in 1909. Muslim communalism, as it is well-known, raised its head early in the last century with encouragement from the British rulers. The Muslims under the leadership of Sir Syed Ahmed's Patriotic Association were holding aloof from the Congress which was being represented as the Hindu Congress. According to Surendranath, communal disharmony was accentuated by the Partition of Bengal.

The new Councils came into existence in 1910. At the very first meeting the Viceroy announced that it had been decided to release all Regulation III prisoners who were not associated with any revolutionary movement.

Under the new regulations, a dismissed government servant was disqualified from seeking election to the Legislative Council. Sir Edward Baker, Lieutenant-Governor of

³¹ 'The Mohomedan Advancement', the *Bengalee*, July 25, 1885.

Bengal and a personal friend of Surendranath, removed Surendranath's disqualification for Council entry, in exercise of his powers as head of the Government. This indeed was an indirect invitation to Surendranath, and that from a friend, to enter the Council and make the Reforms a success. On the personal plane it was difficult for Surendranath to decline the invitation; but on the political plane he was morally bound to do so. His cry was 'Hands off till the Partition is modified'. How could he himself enter the Council while Bengal's wound remained unhealed? Would not the people of East Bengal, who had boycotted the newly formed Council in that Province, feel utterly frustrated? Besides, many of Surendranath's moderate colleagues had suffered similar disqualification because of the same restrictions inherent in the Reforms. How could he leave them behind and go ahead all alone to contest a Council seat? He politely declined Sir Edward's invitation and thus became one of the country's earliest initiators of the policy of Council-boycott, a policy later enthusiastically adopted by the Congress under a new leadership.

CHAPTER XVII

SETTLED FACT UNSETTLED

Meanwhile Surendranath had a novel experience. He was invited to attend the Imperial Press Conference to be held in London in June 1909. The purpose of the Conference was to give an opportunity to the journalists of the Empire to express their views on imperial as well as general issues. Surendranath was chosen as the sole representative of the Indian press as distinguished from the Anglo-Indian press. It has been argued that, in the prevailing political conditions, Surendranath should not have accepted the invitation, since an Indian delegate was bound to be in a false and anomalous position. But the invitation itself, Surendranath thought, was a recognition of the status and importance acquired by the Indian press. Secondly, it gave him an opportunity to explain India's point of view, particularly regarding the Partition, before the journalists of the Empire. He was not ready to give up his fight for the annulment of the Partition, although the Government might have been claiming that it was a settled fact.

At the first day's sitting of the Conference a resolution was adopted regarding cheaper facilities for the telegraphic transmission of news. Surendranath supported it on the ground that cheaper cable rates would facilitate the dissemination of Indian news in the British Press.

The subject of discussion at the second day's Conference, "the Press and the Empire" tended to become controversial. Lord Cromer, late Pro-Consul of Egypt, made a tactless insinuation against the Indian Press hinting that a link between the "wild" outpourings in the Indian Press and the

anarchical outrages in India could be established. He called upon the Indian delegate to say "whether there is any real connection between some of the unquestionably wild writing in a section of the vernacular press of India and the commission of those dastardly outrages which have recently shocked all classes in this country...". adding that "some such connection could be established...".⁹² Surendranath took up the challenge. Replying to Lord Cromer's query with an emphatic 'No', Surendranath said that he would not enter into unnecessary controversy but that he would "exercise the self-control of the East."⁹³ This statement was greeted with loud applause. Speaking in a very restrained and dignified but emphatic tone, he asserted that the Indian people had not misused the boon that the press was. Regarding anarchy he said: "We all deplore those anarchical incidents. My Indian colleagues and myself condemned them in our columns with the utmost emphasis that we could command... And without offence may I be permitted to say that anarchy is not of the East but of the West? It is a noxious growth which has been translated from the West".⁹⁴ It was a fitting reply to Lord Cromer. The speech was highly appreciated.

On the fourth day of the Conference, Surendranath spoke on journalism and literature. Presiding over it, Lord Morley delivered his famous speech comparing literature with journalism.

In the course of the delegation's provincial tour, Surendranath visited a number of places including Stratford-on-Avon, Oxford and Manchester. At the last-named place Surendranath spoke at a luncheon, setting out in emphatic terms India's aspiration for self-government within the

⁹² *Bar, Platform and Pulpit*, August 1914

⁹³ *Ibid*

⁹⁴ *Ibid*

Empire. The speech was very well received. A press delegate sitting next to him said : "If there are 200 men like you in India, Mr. Banerjea, self-government ought to be granted tomorrow". Surendranath replied : "There are twice 200 men like me in India".⁹⁵ The *Manchester Courier*, a journal not always friendly towards India, described the effect of his speech as almost electrical.

Surendranath had been entrusted by the Indian Association as its Honorary Secretary to create public opinion in England in favour of the modification of the Partition. The impression gathered by him during his tour was that no influential and discerning public man of England approved of the Partition. Lord Courtney, a great friend of Lord Morley, and C. P. Scott, editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, were among many who sympathised with the Indian point of view. Having finished his work in England in connection with the Press Conference—Surendranath now devoted himself whole-heartedly to the mission of impressing upon the British public the iniquity underlying the Partition. He addressed a number of gatherings where representative British public men were present and delivered speeches which were highly appreciated for their power and persuasive eloquence. At a dinner organised in his honour by Indian residents, he spoke in the presence of Ramsay Macdonald, Sir Henry Cotton and Mackarness, and left a deep impression on them. Later he spoke at Sir William Wedderburn's breakfast on the Partition and the deportations. Wedderburn was a great friend of India. Sir Charles Dilke, Macdonald and Sir Henry Cotton who had been invited also strongly denounced the deportations. Hume followed with his reminiscences.

About this time a very tragic incident took place, tragic also for the cause Surendranath was seeking to promote.

⁹⁵ *A Nation in Making*

On July 1, 1909, at a meeting of the National Indian Association, Sir William Curzon-Wyllie, Political *Aide-de-camp* to the Secretary of State for India, and Dr. Lalkaka, were shot dead by a young Indian student named Dhingra. The incident shocked the British public and created widespread indignation. In order to undo the mischievous effect of this incident, Surendranath in consultation with the leaders of the Indian student community immediately issued a letter under his signature to be published in all newspapers in Britain, disavowing and repudiating the crime. This was followed by a meeting where Surendranath spoke and challenged the Prime Minister's statement that Dhingra belonged to a wide net of conspiracy in India. The trial subsequently made it clear that Dhingra had acted on his own.

Surendranath was all the time pleading for a reconsideration of the cases of the leaders who had been deported without trial. He met Lord Morley in this connection but without success. The murder of Sir William seemed to have deepened British suspicion.

At a Caxton Hall meeting, presided over by Sir Charles Dilke, Member of Parliament and an eminent public man, Surendranath tried to allay British misgivings by condemning the murder of Sir William and Dr. Lalkaka, and then concentrated upon the two problems of self-government and Partition. The speech was remarkable for its force, restraint and dignity. He declared the Morley-Minto scheme as utterly inadequate. "Far from the scheme being lavish", said he, "I still say that it does not come up to our expectations in many matters which vitally concern the power of the purse".⁹⁶ He refuted the official statement that the anti-Partition movement was on the wane and boldly asserted: "Lord Morley says the Partition is a settled fact. Then I say on behalf of my fellow countrymen that we de-

line to accept it as a settled fact. We decline to accept what is admittedly a blunder...and a wrong to the sentiment of the people".²⁷ He made a scathing criticism of the police *raj*. of repression and arbitrary deportations—and all these, he did not forget to mention, under an administration presided over by a man of pronounced liberal views like Lord Morley.

At the house of Mr. Stead, a friend of India, Surendranath was interviewed in the presence of a cosmopolitan gathering. Dramatically asked to utter a dying message to the British public as if he were under sentence of death and the headsman's axe was to fall in two minutes' time, Surendranath put forward the following demands: (1) Modify the Partition of Bengal; (2) Release the deported patriots and repeal the Act which annuls *Habeas corpus* in Bengal; (3) Grant amnesty to all the political prisoners; (4) Give the people of India control over their own taxes; and (5) Grant India a constitution on the Canadian model.

Pressed to explain why he had asked for "modification" of the Partition instead of its repeal, Surendranath added: "I wish that repeal were possible, but I recognize that Lord Morley, having been challenged perhaps prematurely for an expression of opinion, took up a stand from which he can hardly now be asked to recede. I am a practical man: I ask for modification, not for repeal". He conceded that in the proposed modification, Bihar might remain a separate province but the two wings of the Bengali-speaking people "unnaturally clest in twain by the sword of Lord Curzon" must be brought together.

Surendranath's mission in England in 1909 was a resounding success. He made a profound impression on the British public. According to Mr. Stead, "none of the editors of the Empire excelled him in eloquence, energy,

²⁷ *Bar, Platform and Pulpit*

geniality and personal charm".⁹⁸ Modification of the Partition and self-government for India were the burdens of his speeches and interviews. He came back to India convinced that the Partition was not going to remain a settled fact, despite Lord Morley's contrary assertion, and that there was a strong and growing feeling in England that India was mature for some measure of self-government. Surendranath would not give up hope, he would "surrender not". He says: "Patience and optimism are supreme qualities in public life. That has been my experience, and I bequeath it, with loving concern, to my countrymen".⁹⁹

In 1910 Lord Hardinge succeeded Lord Minto as Viceroy. From his Foreign Office post he brought with him an open mind quite unlike the closed mind of the bureaucracy in India. Thinking that it was necessary to acquaint the Viceroy with the public feeling on the Partition issue, Surendranath and his colleagues called a public meeting to be held at the Town Hall in Calcutta to consider the question. Meanwhile, Surendranath received an urgent invitation to see the new Viceroy. Lord Hardinge suggested that no public meeting was necessary and that he would consider the opinions of the leaders of Bengal through a memorial. Surendranath agreed and the proposed Town Hall meeting was not held. A memorial drafted by Surendranath with the help of Ambikacharan Majumdar was confidentially circulated and signed by representative men in 18 out of 25 districts of Bengal. It was submitted to the Viceroy about the end of June 1911. Some of the arguments in the memorial were accepted and mentioned in Government of India's Despatch of August 25, 1911, as valid reasons for the modification of the Partition. The Partition was modified through an announcement made by King George V at

⁹⁸ *A Nation in Making*

⁹⁹ *Ibid*

the Delhi Durbar on December 12, 1911. Apparently the memorial had produced a profound impression upon Lord Hardinge who came to believe that, if peace was to be restored in the two Bengals, the Partition, which the Bengalis considered unjust and a grievous wrong, must be modified. At the same time the announcement was made transferring the Capital of India from Calcutta to Delhi.

There was a tremendous crowd of expectant visitors that day at the *Bengalee* office hoping for some good news from Delhi. But there was none till evening. Anxious expectation was giving place to keen disappointment. Surendranath dictated an editorial expressing deep dissatisfaction at the Partition not being modified but at the same time urging the people to continue the agitation. It was only after he had finished the article that he heard the news over the telephone that the Partition had been modified.

The news spread instantaneously. Surendranath was literally mobbed, almost forcibly put in a carriage and brought to College Square where he found wild rejoicing in the darkness of the night. The struggle that had gone on unabated and undaunted for six years under his leadership, in the face of repression, had at last borne fruit. It was a personal triumph for Surendranath, a triumph also for the technique of passive resistance so well conducted under his guidance. Surendranath regretted that the Partition had not been modified earlier; the revolutionary movement in Bengal would not in that case have assumed the shape it did. In his opinion, the Partition was very much at the root of the movement. The modification came too late and too late were once again the words written on every line of British policy, he said.

At this moment of his supreme triumph Surendranath lost his beloved wife. She died on December 23, 1911.

The Partition having been modified, Surendranath's self-

imposed ban on Council entry ended. In 1913 he was elected to both the Bengal and the Imperial Legislative Councils. His disqualification for the Bengal Council had already been removed by Sir Edward Baker, but that for the Imperial Council on ground of his dismissal from the Civil Service, which had become ancient history by that time, still stood. Moreover his role as an agitator during the Partition days had prejudiced official attitude towards him. An enquiry was started and old volumes of the *Bengalee* borrowed from the Imperial Library were put under scrutiny for discovering any traces of sedition in them. If he was good enough for the Bengal Council, how could he be otherwise for the Imperial Council? But political prejudice worked in devious ways. In some official circles, of course, there was an apprehension that his disqualification might trigger off a fresh agitation. However, it ended well and Surendranath became a member of the Imperial Legislative Council in February 1913. Possibly it was the personal intervention of Lord Hardinge which had paved the way for him.

Surendranath's legislative career was marked by a strong advocacy of the cause of the people, fearless but balanced criticism of the Government's reactionary policies and constructive suggestions. One of the first things he did in the Council was to move a resolution recommending the separation of the judicial and executive functions in the administration of criminal justice. It was not a new suggestion. The question had already been before the public and the Congress was seized of the issue. Although the resolution was defeated by the official majority, it nevertheless made a deep impression upon the authorities and later formed the subject of a despatch from the Government of India to the Secretary of State.

The other matters with regard to which he moved resolutions were : the Press Act, education, expansion of local self-

government, the appointment of an advisory committee to deal with internecs and the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms proposals. It should be remembered, however, that the Morley-Minto Councils were only advisory in character. The Government could easily ignore the non-official point of view, however unanimous it was and however emphatic the public opinion behind it. It was only on one or two minor matters that the Government occasionally yielded to non-official opinion.

In March 1914, Surendranath moved a resolution recommending elected presidents for district and local boards and the creation of a Local self-Government Board in each province. Despite Lord Ripon's memorable resolution on the subject, the growth of the local bodies suffered badly from neglect and apathy. Very little of real power vested in the popular elements in these bodies. Surendranath's resolution was, of course, defeated but later the Government veered round to his point of view and sent a despatch on the subject to the Secretary of State on these lines.

During the budget discussion for 1916-17, Surendranath in his speech pointed out that, while the excise revenue was going up, the drink and drug habit was growing in alarming proportions. He pleaded for equal treatment of Indians and Europeans for gun licences under the Arms Act and supported measures for the amelioration of the condition of the depressed classes. Making a pointed reference to the remarkable industrial progress Japan had made, he put up a strong plea for the industrialisation of the country.

Surendranath lost his seat in the Imperial Legislative Council in 1916 but again became a member of that body in February 1918. An important achievement of Surendranath was the resolution he moved in the said Council for the appointment of an Advisory Committee, with adequate Indian representation on it, to deal with the cases of internment

and deportation under the Defence of India Act, Regulation III of 1818 and similar other laws. Following a debate, the resolution was accepted in substance by the Government and a Committee was appointed. Mr. Justice Beechcroft and Sir Narayan Chandravarkar were appointed its members. This concession, possibly intended to counteract the growing extremist tendencies, had a mollifying effect upon public opinion.

During the budget discussion in the Imperial Legislative Council, Surendranath once referred to the Government's despatch of August 25, 1911, which not only recommended the modification of Partition but also promised the boon of provincial autonomy and pressed for the financial independence of the provinces as a part of provincial autonomy. The then Finance Member, Sir William Meyer, called him "an impatient idealist". Surendranath retorted that he was an idealist no doubt but neither of the impatient nor of the impractical order and that many of his ideals had been, or were going to be, fulfilled.



CHAPTER XVIII

MONTFORD REPORT AND BREAK WITH THE EXTREMISTS

The First World War broke out in 1914 and brought about a great change in India's political scene. Having lost his seat in the Imperial Legislative Council in 1916, Surendranath set himself earnestly the task of recruitment for war. He toured a large number of places and delivered more than thirty addresses urging people that self-government was meaningless without training for self-defence. His efforts proved very effective. Over 6,000 recruits mostly from among the respectable classes of Bengal were raised. He had also had the new experience of working for the first time in his life on the same platform with high government officials and receiving all the courtesies from them.

England had declared that she had joined the war to defend the cause of liberty, justice and right in the world. India did not lag behind; she made England's cause her own and willingly offered to share the burden. Even Tilak, who was released soon after the outbreak of war, lent his support to war efforts. The British statesmen were full of appreciation for India's spontaneous gesture in this matter. With her gift of a hundred million pounds towards the war effort and help in many other ways, India showed a unique loyalty for which, however, the Defence of India Act, conferring on the Government drastic powers of detention and deportation without trial, was not the expected reward. Unrewarded loyalty bred dissatisfaction.

The political history of this period does not call for detailed mention here. Mrs. Besant's entry into politics in 1913, the re-emergence of Tilak and the Home Rule

League movement were the landmarks of contemporary history. Mrs. Besant's effort at bringing about a Moderate-Extremist rapprochement partially succeeded and resulted in the united session of the Congress in 1916. Equally significant was the Congress-Muslim League concord originating at Karachi in 1913 and fructifying in the Lucknow Pact of 1916. Indian politics was in a transitional stage. The Moderates still had ascendancy in the Congress. But with the passing of the two stalwarts, Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta in 1915, the rank of Moderate leadership was visibly depleted. Surendranath remained the only important leader of the old school. But so far as the Extremists were concerned, a new leadership consisting of Tilak, Mrs. Besant, C. R. Das and a few others had sprung up. Through them the country's demand for self-government found a more effective expression than through the old generation of leadership. Indeed, the emergence of C. R. Das in Bengal was a very important factor so far as Surendranath was concerned. From C. R. Das came the challenge to his leadership resulting in his final overthrow from a position of unquestioned supremacy. The Moderate leadership was failing progressively to keep pace with the popular enthusiasm as well as expectation. The Bombay Congress, for instance, essentially a Moderate Congress, was presided over by S. P. Sinha whose presidential speech does not appear to have been well-received by the Extremists because of its conservative tone. The united Congress of Lucknow where Tilak and Kharpade sat together in an unusual *camaraderie* with Surendranath and Rashbehari Ghosh proved to be a passing phase. Deeper political forces were working which did not take long to burst into the open. Sandwiched between the Government and the Extremists, the Moderates were in an unenviable position. From now on Surendranath's supremacy in politics began to decline.

Though politically opposed to Mrs. Besant, Surendranath pays a high tribute to that eminent lady thus: "...her eloquence, her forceful personality, her indefatigable industry and her power of organisation soon made themselves felt. She had a considerable hand in bringing about the union of the different wings of the Nationalist Party".¹⁰⁰ But Surendranath feels that later it was her founding of the Home Rule League which was responsible for a fresh Moderate-Extremist breach after the reunion. Neither he nor many of the ex-Presidents of the Congress joined it. He incurred some unpopularity on this account. Nevertheless, being convinced that the formation of the Home Rule League would harm rather than strengthen the Congress, he stuck to his principle. People even tried to bully him saying that they would not vote for him at the Imperial Legislative Council election unless he joined the Home Rule League. But, says Surendranath, "in my public life I have never allowed myself to be daunted by the frowns or seduced by the smiles of power".¹⁰¹ When Mrs. Besant was interned, Surendranath presided over two protest meetings and raised his powerful voice against the internment.

Then came the question of passive resistance. The idea of passive resistance gained momentum from three factors. First, the failure of the prevailing political methods to secure self-government drove the frustrated intelligentsia to seek newer channels of self-assertion. Secondly, the Home Rule Movement created a fresh wave of enthusiasm. Lastly, the internment of Mrs. Besant provided the immediate impetus to the passive resistance call. At a meeting of the A.I.C.C. held in Bombay in July 1917 and presided over by Surendranath, the question was discussed threadbare. There was a fairly strong party in favour of passive resistance. But

¹⁰⁰ *A Nation in Making*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*

there was opposition too. Ultimately, consideration of the matter was postponed for a few months. Surendranath who had already tried passive resistance during the anti-Partition movement felt that the strong backing of an overwhelming body of public opinion which alone could make passive resistance successful was lacking at that moment. Meanwhile a meeting convened at Calcutta to be presided over by Rashbehari Ghosh to protest against Mrs. Besant's internment was forbidden by the Government. From Bombay Surendranath hurried back to Calcutta. A conference was held with Surendranath in the chair. Despite strong opinion in favour of holding the meeting in defiance of the Government order, a deputation which included Surendranath and C. R. Das waited upon the Governor, Lord Ronaldshay, to appeal to him to withdraw the prohibitory order. From the Governor's talks, it appeared that the extreme language used at a recent Home Rule League meeting had induced the Government to prohibit the Town Hall meeting apprehending that similar or even more verbal excesses might be committed there. The deputation assured the Governor without giving any undertaking that the meeting would be conducted on reasonable lines and thus succeeded in getting the order of prohibition withdrawn. Surendranath and his colleagues had to face a storm of criticism from the Extremists but according to Surendranath, an immediate collision with the Government had been averted and the people's inalienable right to hold public meetings in a constitutional manner had been vindicated.

The meeting was held under the presidency of Surendranath himself. Times had started changing. Although non-cooperation was yet to come, already there were stirrings and turmoils. While Surendranath kept himself aloof from the contemporary extremist movement, he could read their meaning very clearly.

Another hitch arose in connection with the election of the President of the Calcutta Congress of 1917. The internment of Mrs. Besant had led to a movement to elect her as the President. C. R. Das was also in her favour. Surendranath, as the leader of the Provincial Congress Committee, wanted to have the Raja of Mahmudabad as President, while the Reception Committee favoured Mrs. Besant. Meanwhile several other Provincial Congress Committees also voted in favour of Mrs. Besant. Ultimately, she was elected President. Surendranath thinks that this episode of bitter controversy created a fresh schism in the Congress ranks. The 1917 Congress was "the starting point of the creation of a new party in India which very soon developed as the Moderate and later as the Liberal Party, and this was also the first Congress at which the elder statesmen of the country lost their control over deliberations".¹⁶² Appearing for the last time on the Congress platform, Surendranath delivered his last great speech on his favourite theme of self-government. By this time he was virtually replaced from Bengal's leadership by C. R. Das. The Lucknow unity proved a mere patch-work and the two groups of the national party, the Moderates and the Extremists, soon came to a permanent parting of ways.

The most dramatic event of this time was the announcement of reforms by the Secretary of State for India, Mr. Montagu, in August 1917, followed by his equally dramatic decision to visit India. This was a welcome break from the usual bureaucratic way of doing things and raised expectations which, however, were not entirely fulfilled. The Montagu-Chelmsford proposals, sometimes described as the Montford Proposals, envisaged the realisation of "responsible government" initially in the provinces

¹⁶² *Life and Times of C. R. Das*, P. C. Ray

and in very cautious doses. The Government of India was, however, to be responsible to the Parliament in England through the Secretary of State. In fact the proposals left the Government of India practically where it had been while introducing diarchy in the provinces. The principles on which the Reforms were to be based were in the first instance popular control over local bodies as far as possible and the grant of a measure of responsibility in the provinces through the system of diarchy.

Many historians speak appreciatively of Mr. Montagu's drive and also of his sympathy for India. India was a passion with Montagu, it has been said. He came to India in November with his delegation and toured the country for six months holding conferences and cross-examining people. Surendranath was one of the persons severely cross-examined. Mr. Montagu says : "We were now face to face with the real giants of the Indian political world...old Surendranath Banerjea, the veteran from Bengal, read the address which was beautifully written and beautifully read...the rest of the day was spent in interviews. First came Surendranath Banerjea. He was loquacity itself, garrulous, sedulous, but there was no sign of moderation or compromise in him. The Congress scheme was the least he would accept".¹⁰³

The storm that the Montagu-Chelmsford report, published in July 1918, raised is well known. It was rejected outright by the extremist opinion. Tilak described it as "entirely unacceptable". Mrs. Besant denounced it too. Among Congressmen there were sharp differences of opinion. Nobody found the report entirely acceptable. While none were fully satisfied, there was difference in the degree of disapprobation. While some would possibly press for its total rejection others would be satisfied with a mere amendment.

¹⁰³ *An Indian Diary*

The main features of the Montford Reforms as embodied in the Government of India Act, 1919, may be stated here briefly. The Reforms envisaged progressive realisation of responsible government and recommended increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration along with the gradual development of self-governing institutions.

In the constitutional sphere it left the Government of India almost where it was, the Secretary of State continuing to possess powers of superintendence and control over the same. A bicameral Legislature was provided for at the Centre with wider powers where members could put interpellations and supplementary questions and move resolutions and adjournment motions. Barring some non-votable items in the Central budget, other items of expenditure were votable subject to the Governor-General's overriding power. In fact the executive was made independent of the legislature, it being vested with overriding powers in almost all respects.

In the provincial sphere the Act introduced government in two parts, that is, diarchy, under which certain subjects were reserved and certain others transferred. The former were to be administered by the Governor with the help of a nominated Executive Council and the latter were to be dealt with by him with the help of ministers chosen by himself. The Governor was thus clearly not a constitutional head; he had many special responsibilities and could over-rule his ministers.

The size of the Provincial Council was considerably enlarged with 70 per cent elected members and 30 per cent nominated. They could ask questions and put supplementaries and even reject the budget, although the Governor had the power to restore it.

At a special conference of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee held in July 1918 the Moderates found themselves in a helpless position so far as the acceptance of

the Reform was concerned. The difference between Surendranath and C. R. Das was once again brought to the fore. While the former favoured the acceptance of the report, Chittaranjan, who had earlier told Montagu that there could be no half-way house between responsible government and complete responsibility, considered the Reforms inadequate. The final decision was left to the special Congress of Bombay to be held in August 1918. The A.I.C.C. and the Provincial Congress Committees had by that time a majority of the supporters of Chittaranjan Das's way of thinking. Das himself took an active part in having Bombay as the venue and Mr. Hasan Imam as the President. Surendranath and his principal moderate colleagues absented themselves from the special Congress session and held a conference of the Moderate Party in Bombay in November 1918. Surendranath presided over the Conference. Before the rift was final, some efforts were made for a rapprochement but without success. The breach, long anticipated, was now complete.

To Surendranath who had built up the Congress with his life-blood, as it were, it was an agonising experience. The difference between the two groups was fundamental and upon a matter of vital interest, namely, the question of self-government for the country. Surendranath says: "The Congress however great an organization was after all a means to an end. That end was self-government. We decided to sacrifice the means for the end".¹⁰⁴ As a matter of fact, it was the Moderates who saved the Reforms scheme and Surendranath doubtless played a very effective role in this matter. At its special session, the Congress expressed dissatisfaction over the Reforms, took its stand on the Congress-League scheme, declared that nothing short of self-government within the Empire would satisfy the Indian

¹⁰⁴ *A Nation in Making*

aspirations and asserted, in repudiation of the implication of the Montagu-Chelmsford report, that Indians were fit for responsible government.

But why did Surendranath choose to support the Montford scheme ? Was it simply because of the loaves and fishes of office ? Considering the sturdy independence and indomitable spirit of Surendranath, of which we have seen unmistakable evidence throughout his career, nobody could ever imagine that he could have been coaxed or cajoled into submission.

In accepting the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme and giving it a fair trial, Surendranath had acted according to his own life-long ideas and convictions which he has explained in his speeches and in *A Nation in Making*. He plainly confesses that for him the goal had always been self-government within the Empire through constitutional agitation. His early political career had been one of persistent and uncompromising agitation. But when, with the coming of the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme, there were, in his estimation, definite signs of an advance in Government policy and his co-operation was invited to build even the barest framework of responsible government, it would have been unwise and unpatriotic of him not to co-operate. That is how he argued. The Extremist point of view was that the Montford proposals fell far short of the national objective of responsible government in the real sense of the term. They felt that India was fit enough for responsible government contrary to the assumption underlying the proposals which conferred, according to Tilak, "one anna of responsible government", C. R. Das demanded real responsible government in five years and the promise of it right then. On the one hand the Extremists were violently denouncing the scheme and on the other Anglo-India was not favourably disposed towards it. There was a third party trying to wreck the scheme, namely, Lord

Sydenham and the die-hards like him. Surendranath argued that if the country were to benefit by what little the Reforms offered, they must be accepted and worked.

Surendranath and his colleagues thus welcomed the scheme because they felt that it would be the height of unpatriotism to withhold co-operation with the Government where it was needed. They were well aware of the limitations of the Reforms and had no illusions about them. But they felt that by accepting them for what they were worth, they would be able to press for more and thus make a distinct advance towards the goal of self-government. And that was what the announcement of August 20, 1917, had assured. In other words, Surendranath and his colleagues had placed implicit faith in the bona fides of Mr. Montagu and the British Government. This incidentally, was also the spirit of the amendment Gandhiji moved to C. R. Das's resolution at the Amritsar Congress of 1919 declaring the Reforms "unsatisfactory, inadequate and disappointing".¹⁰³ Even Das yielded ultimately to Gandhiji's plea for what may be called responsive co-operation, though the Moderates had broken away from the Congress over this very issue. There was not a very wide difference between the Congress creed and the liberal philosophy professed by Surendranath. A system of Government similar to that obtaining in the other self-governing units of the Empire is what the Congress aimed at till 1920, when the creed was changed to the attainment of Swaraj by all legitimate and peaceful means. But what differentiated the Moderates from the Nationalists was that the latter lacked the implicit faith in the British which the former had. It is this difference, however, which made for a lot of difference in the political behaviour of the two parties.

¹⁰³ *Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, H. N. Das Gupta (Builders of Modern India Series)*

Surendranath's views on Reforms were not very different from Tilak's "responsive co-operation" or the concept of "honourable co-operation" developed by C. R. Das later in life. Deshabandhu Chittaranjan's address at the Bengal Provincial Conference at Faridpur in May 1925, only about a month and a half before his death, is a striking document showing how he had mellowed down into accepting the Commonwealth idea and also honourable co-operation. He said : "I think it is for the good of India, for the good of the Commonwealth, for the good of the world that India should strive for freedom within the Commonwealth and so serve the cause of humanity".¹⁰⁶ Again, "provided some real responsibility is transferred to the people, there is no reason why we should not co-operate with the Government".¹⁰⁷ Mr. P. C. Ray, who was in close touch with Deshbandhu during the last days of his life, says that a few days before his death, Chittaranjan had told him that he would be ready to work the Montagu scheme, provided the Ministers were allowed to work as the real masters of their own house."¹⁰⁸

The Congress boycotted the Reforms of 1919 and took to the path of non-cooperation. A few years later, in January 1923, the Swarajya Party was formed by Motilal Nehru and C. R. Das with a view to offering persistent and continuous opposition to the working of the Reforms. But eventually it was seen that a policy of continuous opposition was after all a negative policy and earned no dividends. Later, the Swarajist party disintegrated and some of its enthusiastic members turned co-operators. The significant

¹⁰⁶ Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das, H. N. Das Gupta (Builders of Modern India Series)

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁸ Life and Times of C. R. Das, P. C. Ray

change that came over C. R. Das, the prince among the Swarajists, has already been referred to.

To go back to the earlier thread of the story. In the midst of the heat and dust of controversy over the Reforms, Surendranath parted company with the Congress. A conference of the Moderates was held in Bombay on November 1, 1918, with Surendranath in the chair, forming the nucleus of the National Liberal Federation of India. In his presidential address, Surendranath ruled out the word "Moderate" and said that he would like to designate them the "Centre Wing of the Nationalist Party". He put forward the Moderate testament of faith in the following words : "We are the friends of evolution and enemies of revolution. We abhor revolution alike in our own interests and those of the Government. Our creed is co-operation with the Government whenever practicable and opposition to its policy and measures when the supreme interests of the Motherland require it... We deprecate opposition for the sake of opposition." Describing the Montagu message of August 20, 1917, as "the greatest of our charters" and a "striking and memorable departure" in our relations with the British, he warned that if the Reforms proposals were whittled down in any way, there would be grave consequences.

In an article captioned "The Lead of the Moderates", published in *New India* and reproduced in the *Bombay Chronicle* of November 11, 1918, Mrs. Besant criticised the old Congress veterans for lagging behind the country. Surendranath Banerjea, she said, weighed for his past, "but he has deserted his old colours". This was a reaction to the Bombay conference of the Moderates.

CHAPTER XIX

MODERATE DEPUTATION TO ENGLAND

In the Imperial Legislative Council, Mr. Montagu got full support for his Reforms proposals and his position was later strengthened by the support given by the Moderates.

Surendranath moved a resolution in the Imperial Legislative Council urging the appointment of a committee consisting of all the non-official members of the Council to consider the Reforms report and make recommendations to the Government. In his speech he said that the Reforms report afforded a striking illustration of a change in the outlook of the rulers and asserted that it should evoke a similar change in the attitude of the Indian people towards the Government. "Adaptability is the law of life, individual and collective. Adaptability is life, the lack of it is death". In moving the resolution, he made his and his moderate colleagues' position regarding the Reforms quite clear. He said: "I regard the Reform proposals as a distinct advance upon the existing state of things, nay more, as a distinct stage towards the progressive realisation of responsible government... in the whole history of British relations with India there never has been a more gracious message than that of the 20th August, 1917... the scheme needs improvement, modification and expansion.....we want to build upon it, we want to modify and expand the scheme in conformity with its essence and spirit".¹⁶² He added that the report "affords a striking illustration of a change in the angle of vision on the part of our rulers and I venture to assert that it ought to be

accompanied by a similar transformation in our attitude in regard to the government of the country." He continued: "My Lord, we live in a psychological moment in the history of our country. We are at the parting of ways. The future is committed to our care and keeping. We can make it or mar it. I appeal to my countrymen to make it by the exhibition of those qualities of courage, prudence, and self-restraint, coupled with patriotic devotion, which constitute the crowning attributes of national life."¹¹⁰

Lord Chelmsford, who was presiding, split the resolution into two parts and put them separately to vote. The resolution as a whole was carried. The same evening the Viceroy sent for Surendranath and requested him to preside over the committee he had himself proposed. Surendranath agreed and was appointed chairman of the Committee. Among other things the Committee recommended diarchy at the Centre as well. He said : "If Diarchy is practicable and possible in the provinces it should be tried in the Central Government with the exclusion of such departments as the army and the Indian States."¹¹¹ In most of his pronouncements on the Reforms, Surendranath stressed this point.

As a member of the Franchise Committee, presided over by Lord Southborough, Surendranath visited many places but nowhere found the spirit of boycott or refusal to furnish information. As a member of a Government Committee entrusted with a very important public duty, he had a novel experience indeed. The principle of communal representation having been accepted, there was no going back upon it. But in fixing the ratio, the Committee followed substantially the Lucknow agreement. A separate electorate for the Sikhs was created, under orders from superior autho-

¹¹⁰ *Proceedings of the Indian Legislative Council, September, 1918*

¹¹¹ *A Nation in Making*

riety. Similarly the question arose about creating a separate electorate for *zamindars*. Personally Surendranath was averse to the creation of such "privileged classes". But the higher authorities had decided otherwise, and the Committee was bound by their mandate. These and similar other questions had to be tackled by the Committee whose task was rendered difficult by the varied and complicated nature of the problems.

A few words may be relevant here about Surendranath's attitude towards the Rowlatt Bills. Since the extraordinary powers conferred by the Defence of India Act were about to lapse with the war coming to an end, the bureaucracy insisted on being armed with similar special powers, though in a different form, for maintaining internal peace and order. On the report of the Rowlatt Committee, two bills were introduced in February 1919 in the Imperial Legislative Council and eventually passed, despite stiff opposition from the Indian members of the Council. This came as a profound shock to politically conscious India and exposed the hollowness of the professions of the British rulers. The chain reaction which the passing of the two bills set off in the country needs no reiteration. Surendranath, who considered these bills "the parent of non-cooperation", fought their passage in the Council tooth and nail.

While introducing one of the two bills, the Criminal Law (Emergency Powers) Bill, Sir William Vincent, Home Member, took the familiar plea of revolutionary outrages and activities. He did so in case of the other measure, the Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, as well. Strongly criticising the first named Bill, Surendranath said: "...it is no use disguising the fact that the Bill has created widespread anxiety and alarm in the public mind of India, and I must say there is abundant justification for this feeling. It is feared that if this Bill is passed, it will cripple our political aeti-

vities and bring about the stagnation of our public life".¹¹² He maintained that no case had been made out for such a bill and predicted that it would lead to fierce agitation, as did Lord Curzon's rash and wrong policies. He, therefore, moved an amendment urging the reference of the Bill to Local Governments, High Courts and public bodies for their opinion. In connection with the second Bill also, he made a strong plea for its modification to remove the anxiety and alarm from the public mind. But the Government went ahead with the measures, heedless of criticisms and protests. The course of later events fully justified Surendranath's predictions.

In 1919, Surendranath led a Moderate deputation to England to express the party's views on the Reforms as far as they were acceptable and to press for their expansion where necessary. The deputation included Srinivasa Sastri, C. Y. Chintamani and a few others. Tej Bahadur Sapru joined it later. The deputation testified before the Joint Parliamentary Committee presided over by Lord Selborne. Coming to England Surendranath found that Tilak's extreme views had undergone a modification, and even Mrs. Besant no longer regarded the Reforms as unacceptable. Between her views and the Moderates' there was general agreement now. Surendranath gave testimony before the Joint Committee of which Montagu himself was a member. A large number of witnesses were examined, including Tilak, Tej Bahadur Sapru, and Vithalbhai J. Patel who represented the Congress. One point on which Indian witnesses were very emphatic was the need for introduction of responsibility into the Central Government. A proposal regarding separate funds for the transferred departments was not accepted by the Committee. Such a provision would have obviated the difficulty created by the paucity of funds for the transferred

¹¹² *Proceedings of the Indian Legislative Council, 1918-1919*

departments, which the Ministers under the new Act, including Surendranath, had to experience later. The major part of the revenue was allocated to the reserved departments.

Another point discussed related to the recommendation in the Montford Report that a Parliamentary Commission would come to India five years after the initiation of the scheme to review its working. This period was increased to ten years by the parliamentary statute. Testifying before the Joint Committee, many of the members urged adherence to the original time schedule of five years but the Committee did not accept this. Surendranath felt that it was an unwise decision and that ten years was too long a period for the Indians to hold their soul in patience. The prospect of an end of the diarchy within five years would, according to him, have had a soothing effect on popular opinion. Diarchy was being looked upon as a risky experiment; even all Britons were not happy over it, as Surendranath found out in England. But he felt that, since responsible government was the ultimate end and since the British Government would not grant it except by stages, there was no escape from it.

While the Indian leaders were testifying before the Joint Committee in a quiet chamber overlooking the Thames, India was being convulsed with one of the most serious unrests in her recent history, following the Punjab repression and the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. The whole of India was seething with pain, indignation and unrest. Both the delegations, Moderate and Congress, which were then holding discussions at the imperial capital, were naturally seriously affected by the upheaval in the Punjab and its repercussions on the rest of the country. A public meeting was held, and the Moderates had more than one conference with Mr. Montagu. Surendranath claims that it was the Moderates who urged an open enquiry into the whole gruesome wrong. Surendranath tells us that in

this regard "there was no difference between the Moderates and the Extremists except perhaps in regard to details".¹¹³

It has been suggested in certain quarters that Surendranath did not register his protest against the Jallianwala Bagh tragedy as emphatically as he should have. But his autobiography bears an eloquent testimony to his strong denunciation of "the disastrous policy pursued by Sir Michael O'Dwyer in Punjab". Conscious that the horrors of Jallianwala Bagh had "kindled a conflagration throughout India which it will take many years to allay", he says that these incidents had "invested the Reforms with a sinister hue". He goes on : "The sense of indignation at the proceedings of the Punjab Government was universal throughout India and was shared by our countrymen residing in England. It is a matter of regret that the Despatch of the Secretary of State was not more thorough in its sense of disapproval and more emphatic in its tone of condemnation: and the situation was aggravated by the subsequent debate in the House of Lords... It is a grave warning to the rulers of men of the incalculable mischief of wrong-doing in all high matters of state."¹¹⁴

There were two other matters with which Surendranath was associated during his stay in England. In the first instance, the Secretary of State appointed him a member of a committee composed of I.C.S. men, then on leave in England, to enquire into the local self-governing institutions in that country with reference to their relevance to Indian conditions. He was the only non-official member of the committee. And in this capacity he had to tour a good deal. The experience he gathered stood him in good stead as Local Self-Government Minister later. One of his proposals was the setting up of a Local Self-Government

¹¹³ *A Nation in Making*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*

Board in each province which, however, was opposed by most Provincial Governments in India. Secondly, he waited in a deputation on Mr. Montagu to draw his attention to the status of Indians in the British colonies which had become an important issue at that time. Montagu gave a sympathetic reply. Lastly, he presided over one of the meetings of Indian Muslims resident in England to discuss the Khilafat question.

CHAPTER XX

AS LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT MINISTER

At the Amritsar Congress held shortly after Surendranath's return to India, the Gandhi-Das compromise on the Reforms was arrived at by adding a rider to the main resolution providing for the conditional working of the Reforms by the people pending the establishment of full responsible government. How strange and baffling the courses of politics are is evident from the fact that at Amritsar, "while Das (C.R.) was inclined to obstruction and rejection—shall we say, non-cooperation—Gandhi was there as an apostle of cooperation. Yes, that he was".¹¹⁵

But things were destined to change rapidly. The non-official Punjab Disorders Enquiry Committee was unanimous in condemning the Punjab atrocities. But the Government rejected its findings and also the minority report of the Hunter Committee, appointed by the Government to go into the disorders in the Punjab and some other provinces, and absolved General Dyer. Indeed there were demonstrations in favour of General Dyer in certain British quarters. All these circumstances brought about a complete change in Gandhi's attitude as well as strategy. He was thoroughly disillusioned with the British rulers and decided to start a new movement on the basis of non-cooperation.

The special Calcutta session of the Congress of 1920 tentatively accepted Gandhiji's programme of non-co-

¹¹⁵ *History of the Congress*, Sitaramayya

operation. C. R. Das was now against boycotting the new Councils—he was in favour of obstruction from within. But Gandhiji's will prevailed. The usual session of the Congress towards the end of the year endorsed the decision. But elections to the new Councils having taken place, the question of boycotting the Councils did not arise afresh. In 1915 Gandhiji had declared his loyalty to the Empire. Even in 1919, he had not crossed the Rubicon, despite the Rowlatt Act and its consequences. But by the middle of 1920, the chain of events including the Government's utter callousness in respect of the Punjab atrocities completely shattered his faith in the British, and he found psychologically a most opportune moment for starting his revolutionary mass movement and trying to forge Hindu-Muslim unity in the process.

It was in an atmosphere surcharged with the spirit of non-cooperation that the Reforms were introduced. They had thus a most inauspicious start. The Liberals had lost their pull. According to C. Y. Chintamani, the Liberals' secession from the Congress in 1918 was not initially a step of a permanent nature¹¹⁶. But later events, including launching of non-cooperation by the Congress, completed the breach.

The non-cooperation agitation was gathering momentum. Triple boycott—of Councils, courts and educational institutions—was resorted to. The Councils were to be shunned like things unclean and impure. People's enthusiasm was afire. Signs of a great mass upheaval were in evidence. The people who sought entry into the "unclean" Council halls or, worse still, accepted office under the new Act, were looked upon with strong disapproval and disfavour. The Liberals were severely criticised and

¹¹⁶ *Indian Politics since Mutiny*

even abused. The elder statesmen, who had been the country's accredited spokesmen till then, pointed their finger at the Reforms which, though not of much consequence immediately, paved the way for full responsible government. Surendranath tried his best to impress this point of view upon his countrymen through the press, on the platform and from his seat in the Legislative Council. But the country had heard a more powerful voice which had penetrated the core of its being—the voice of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The waves of non-cooperation were surging all round him but Surendranath still stood apart, refusing to swim with the current and firm in his own conviction, however different it might be from that of the new Congress leadership.

In the elections under the Government of India Act, 1919, Surendranath was returned unopposed to the Bengal Legislative Council from the constituency of the municipalities of the Barrackpore Sub-Division. In view of the Congress non-cooperation, the Liberals had the field left to themselves for the first three years of the new Councils. The boycott of Councils was ineffective. While many bold and worthy people stood out in deference to Gandhiji's wishes, many others, including a number of Liberal stalwarts, entered the Councils in different provinces. It has been observed that, as a result of the Congress boycott, many opportunists also found their way into the Legislative chambers. The Governor, Lord Ronaldshay, now offered Surendranath the post of a Minister, one of the three to be appointed under the new Act. The offer was not unexpected. Surendranath was also given freedom to choose his portfolio. Surendranath accepted the offer and wanted to have the portfolios of Education and Local Self-Government. This combination having been found unsuitable from the point of view of secretariat

arrangement, he was given the portfolio of Local Self-Government with the Medical department linked to it. His colleagues were P. C. Mitra and Nawab Ali Chaudhury. Actually it was he who had suggested Mitra's name in response to the Governor's request. The choice of Chaudhury had of course, been facilitated by a pamphlet he had written, denouncing non-cooperation. Between Chaudhury and the other Ministers, Surendranath says, the personal relations were good but sharp differences arose over communal issues. It seemed that Surendranath and Chaudhury were at two extreme poles. Mitra as well as Banerjea were tolerant and secular in their attitude and aimed at the eventual abolition of communal representation. But Chaudhury was uncompromising. Surendranath was a passionate upholder of united Bengal, while Chaudhury was a warm advocate of the Partition. The communal poison, having once been injected into the constitution and the administrative system, had gone far too deep.

In January 1921, on the eve of his assumption of office, Surendranath was knighted. Surendranath accepted Knighthood as well as Ministership. Many lamented that Surendranath had become a "lost leader", "just for a riband to stick in his coat".

Surendranath, who had been Secretary to the Indian Association for 36 years, was elected its President in 1921. He was one of the makers of the Association and his election as its President was a fitting recognition of his services. He held the position till his death in 1925. From now on the Indian Association became a full-fledged unit of the Liberal Federation. The Liberal Federation went on with its old policies whose appeal was limited to a few people, while Gandhiji addressed himself to the masses. The Liberals were opposed to non-cooperation and strictly adhered to constitutional means. An appeal issued by the

Reception Committee of the (1920) Madras session of the National Liberal Federation said "the menace of the non-cooperation movement continues strong" and went on to appeal to men of position and influence to further the traditions of the old Congress of Hume, Dadabhai, Wedderburn, Gokhale and Mehta. This was perhaps an attempt to put the clock back. The tides of non-cooperation were surging; even C. R. Das had eventually fallen in line with Gandhiji. With non-cooperation repression went hand in hand. The Government made the fullest use of all the powers in its hands to put down the movement. People were going to jail by the thousands. Nor were the leaders spared. The repression strengthened the Congress morale instead of weakening it. This was the background against which the Ministers started working under the Montagu Act.

The new Ministry in Bengal was installed in office on January 4, 1921. The Executive Councillors and Ministers went in a procession to the Throne Room, took the oath of office and sat round a table as a Cabinet, presided over by the Governor. After a brief but solemn ceremony they went back to their respective offices. Thus began Surendranath's three-year career as a Minister.

The Ministers were new to the task and to the official climate of the Secretariat. In his reminiscences Surendranath has left a vivid account of his official life. He acknowledges that his European Secretaries and other officials were generally helpful and cooperative and assisted him in his work. Not that differences of opinion never arose between him and the officials. But these, he assures us, were like a passing breeze. The officials were veterans in their jobs; Surendranath was new to his, having nothing but a record of public service behind him. But by his sympathetic attitude and also by his goodwill, he succeeded

in creating an atmosphere of trust and cooperation all round him. He refers in particular to his Secretary O'Malley, who was an Irishman with all the warmth peculiar to the Celtic race. Then there was Dr. Bentley, the head of the sanitary department. Surendranath refers appreciatively to Williams, Chief Engineer of the sanitary works.

While the atmosphere inside the Secretariat was one of cooperation, that outside was hostile. The press was saturated with the spirit of non-cooperation. Surendranath maintained his living contacts with the public and continued to behave as a leader of the people should. He was the President of the Indian Association and Chairman of the North Barrackpur municipality. But public temper had changed completely. He and other Ministers were called "brown bureaucrats". He no longer commanded the audience he did before.

Proceeding upon Burke's theory that conciliation is the best remedy for political distempers. Surendranath took what was then considered a novel and original step. He called a press conference in July 1921 to explain to the people through the medium of the press how the Government wanted to consult public opinion in framing policies. But the nationalist press was found unenthusiastic. Similarly in connection with the Calcutta Municipal Bill and the Bengal Municipal Bill, he called conferences of the representatives of the interests concerned to consult their opinion and seek their cooperation.

In pursuance of the policy of consulting public opinion he toured the whole of Bengal and tried to gather opinion concerning the departments in his charge. In some places he had to face obstructive tactics from non-cooperators. By a strange reversal of circumstances, he went to Barisal as a Minister, the same Barisal where, fifteen years ago

he had been arrested and convicted as an arch anti-Partition agitator. But now the situation had changed. The same Emerson who as district magistrate of Barisal was responsible for Surendranath's arrest and conviction, now as Commissioner of the Dacca Division rushed to Barisal to help the Local Self-Government Minister in his work.

Wherever Surendranath went, a *hartal* was started by the non-cooperators. But Surendranath persisted in his mission at considerable personal sacrifice and expense. His purpose was to secure popular cooperation in matters of sanitation and public health. The Government might launch policies and measures but their success depended ultimately on public cooperation. For the first time a substantial sum of money was granted from the Medical department in his charge to the Anti-Malaria Cooperative Society and the Kala-azar Association.

As Local Self-Government Minister, Surendranath had several achievements to his credit. At one time, he was an ardent champion of the de-officialisation of the local bodies. One of the first things he did as a Minister was to implement vigorously the policy he had all along been fighting for. He was able to undo the Mackenzie Act by putting on the statute book the new Calcutta Municipal Act which greatly democratised the institution. He was also able to introduce in the legislature an amending Bengal Municipal Bill for the purpose of reorganizing the local bodies in the province.

The Calcutta Municipal Act has been described as "one of the major contributions of Surendranath Banerjea to the development of local self-government in India."¹¹⁷ Reference has already been made (Chapter IX) to the

¹¹⁷ *Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das*, H. N. Das Gupta (Builders of Modern India Series)

undemocratic Calcutta Municipal Act which the Government of Lord Curzon had passed in 1899 in the face of stiff opposition from Surendranath and others. The purpose of that measure was to exalt the authority of the Chairman and reduce that of the Corporation. Describing it as a measure of a most extraordinary character, Surendranath had said in the Council on that occasion: "The Hon'ble Minister in charge of the Bill went so far as to say that he would not give the Corporation any power which could with due propriety be vested in any other municipal authority. If that was the feeling which underlay the measure, why enact the farce of a Corporation at all? Why not reduce it to a department of the Government?"¹¹⁸ Now the time had come for him to undo the great wrong done to the citizens of Calcutta. Introducing the amending Municipal Bill in the legislature in November, 1921, he said: "Twenty-two years have come and gone... I ventured to indulge in the prediction that the estimable boon of local self-government would within a measurable distance of time be restored to the city of my birth. The time has come. The day has arrived. I have lived to see it. I thank God on my knees."¹¹⁹

The purpose of the new Bill was to widen the franchise and to democratize the Corporation. Surendranath took care to revise the constitutional part of the old Act and bring it in conformity with the spirit of the Reforms. The control of the municipal affairs was vested in the rate-payers' representatives elected mostly on a broad franchise. The Corporation, having four-fifths of its members as elected representatives, would have control of its vast revenues amounting to about one-fifth of the reve-

¹¹⁸ *Proceedings of the Council of Lt-Governor of Bengal, 1899*
¹¹⁹ *A Nation in Making*

tales of the then province of Bengal. There would be a Chief Executive Officer to execute the works under the guidance of an elected Mayor who would act as the Speaker of the house. Another important feature of the Bill was the expansion of Calcutta city limits by adding some suburban areas to the Corporation's jurisdiction. Since this was a controversial question, Surendranath deemed it fit to proceed upon the recommendations of a Boundary Commission he had set up specifically for the purpose. At that distance of time Surendranath visualised a rapid expansion of the city of Calcutta.

Moving for the reference of the Bill to a Select Committee, Surendranath said that the entire system of self-government—local, provincial and imperial—should be an organic whole and that "it must be strengthened at the base by the liberalization of our local institutions".¹²⁰ The passing of the Bill in March 1923 was the realization of one of the dreams of Surendranath's life.

All these were a great advance upon the existing state of affairs. But one aspect of the Bill evoked criticism—it was the recognition of the principle of communal representation in the Bill. Even the Indian Association, which supported the constructive programmes under the transferred departments, took exception to the same. Surendranath was personally opposed to representation on communal basis. Communal representation, he said, was "unsound in principle" and "hurtful in practice". But his explanation was that he had accepted it as a compromise and as a temporary measure because otherwise there was chance of his suffering defeat in the Council and the Bill being thrown out. Incidentally, he mentions in his autobiography that the Swarajists themselves recognized

¹²⁰ *Proceedings of the Bengal Council, 1922*

the same principle in the Hindu-Muslim pact later entered into by Chittaranjan Das. The pact provided, among other things, for representation to the Council through joint electorates on the basis of population and special weightage to Muslims till they made up their numerical deficiency in the services. The communal principle having once been recognized, it was difficult for any leader, Surendranath or Deshbandhu Das, to get out of its meshes.

The new Calcutta Municipal Act, which democratized the great civic institution on a broad-based franchise, was Surendranath's handiwork. But in the first democratic elections that followed, it was the Swarajists under C. R. Das who captured the Corporation. Nearly fifty-five out of seventy-five elective seats were taken by the Swarajya Party, and Chittaranjan Das was elected the first Mayor. This remarkable victory invested the Swarajya Party and its founder-leader with a new glamour and a new political importance. It must be remembered, however, that it was Surendranath's life-long work and his passion for local self-government which had paved the way for this consummation.

Surendranath, however, complains in his autobiography that having come to power in the new Corporation, the Swarajists started using it for party purposes. This, in his opinion, was unfair. Surendranath was not in favour of mixing civic affairs with politics. Besides, he did not approve of C. R. Das's election to the position of Mayor, because Das had never had any experience of municipal administration. The high position of Mayor should, in his opinion, have gone to one who had grown grey in the service of a municipality.

Surendranath also tried to give tangible shape to a principle he had passionately adhered to throughout his

long career, namely, the Indianisation of the services. That he was, early in his life, a victim of racial discrimination in service was a personal issue. Surendranath believed that the cause of self-government could be effectively promoted through Indians having a greater share in the administration. Now as a Minister, he had an opportunity to make a start, necessarily cautious, in view of the many difficulties which beset the question and in view particularly of the possible impediments from interested quarters. Of course he tried Indianisation of the services without allowing efficiency to suffer. Efficiency was in fact his first concern. Before the democratization of the Calcutta Corporation, the post of the Chairman used to be held by European civilians. But when Chairman Payne went on leave in 1921, Surendranath took courage to appoint J. N. Gupta, an Indian member of the Civil Service, to the post on a temporary basis. Later, he went a step further by appointing a non-official, S. N. Mallik, to the position, when Gupta proceeded on leave on grounds of health, in the face of objections raised in certain quarters. Mallik was an able lawyer and elected member of both the Corporation and the Council. Mallik's appointment as well as his conspicuous success in the top civic position earned public approbation—even from Surendranath's opponents.

Surendranath was bent upon following the same principle in the medical department as well and drew up a scheme in this regard which was almost wholly approved by the Secretary of State. The Indianisation of the medical service was a result of his efforts. He appointed some eminent doctors to the Calcutta Medical College as honorary physicians. To overcome the woeful lack of medical facilities in the province, he gave an impetus to the expansion of medical education in Bengal through a policy of opening medical schools. He raised a constitutional point

and had it thrashed out largely in his favour. The appointment of the Indian Medical Service personnel was made by the Government of India, although they were paid for by the Government of Bengal. Surendranath contended that, since he was in charge of the medical department as a transferred subject, appointments made to the department should be controlled by him, subject of course to the Government of India's advice. The point was practically conceded.

As a Minister of the Crown, Surendranath had to face a lot of hostile criticism from certain sections of the people. Much of it was due to the fervour of non-cooperation and the hostility towards the Reforms generated among the people. But at least a part of the criticism appears to have been unmerited. When in October 1922, a disastrous flood visited North Bengal causing widespread havoc, he was accused of being callous to the suffering of the people. Along with the other members of the Government Surendranath was then in Darjeeling. Flood relief, being a reserved subject, was not his charge. Even then, an old man of seventy-four, he toured the flood-affected area, trolleying 20 miles through the vast ravages and under a burning sun, and came back to Darjeeling only to fall seriously ill due to the heavy strain. This spontaneous response to public suffering, however, went unheeded by his critics.

How did diarchy work? It is a difficult question on which opinion is bound to be divided. Many are of the opinion that diarchy failed and that was because of its inherent constitutional contradiction. The division of administrative authority into two water-tight compartments led to lack of co-ordination, even frictions and clashes. The Executive Councillors, who belonged to the bureaucracy, and the Ministers, who were the elected representa-

tives of the people, did not get along together. In fact the Ministers' position was weak. It was the Governor who wielded supreme authority. For their part, the Ministers too, as a measure of practical politics, depended upon the Governor and the official block for support. Worst of all, while the nation-building departments were under the charge of the Ministers, the purse strings were controlled by the Finance Department presided over by an Executive Councillor. Really useful schemes launched by the Ministers suffered from inanition.

These flaws and defects which appeared in the actual functioning of diarchy were not unanticipated. Criticism of diarchy, even before it was installed, hinged on these dismal and also distinct possibilities. If, however, allowance is made for them, it may be said that the Ministers were able to do useful work in some directions, even though within painful limitations.

Surendranath did not claim any spectacular success for diarchy. He was fully conscious of its many flaws and limitations. On behalf of the Liberal Federation, he had told the Joint Parliamentary Committee that it was not an "ideal" system but the only "feasible" system under the circumstances and that "it provides for Responsible Government at the first start, and it brings Responsible Government within sight by providing progressive stages."¹² Surendranath would view diarchy in this light. He, however, did not believe that diarchy had failed—not at least in Bengal. It is true that some Ministers elsewhere in the country felt utterly frustrated. But Surendranath's experience was otherwise, if one goes by his own observations in his reminiscences. There were several difficulties inherent in the situation. Outside there were the surging

tides of non-cooperation, contempt and abuse for the Ministers, their public accusation even for faults not their own; in the Government itself, there was the greatest stumbling block, lack of finance. Under the Reforms, the Provincial Governments had to work under several restrictions on their resources and finances, and the Meston Award did not improve matters.

The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms called for a bifurcation of subjects between the Centre and the provinces involving heavy financial deficit for the former. A committee was therefore set up under Lord Meston to go into the question of financial relations between the Centre and the Provinces. The Meston Award recommended compulsory annual contributions by provinces to make up the Central deficit according to certain formulae. The result was that the provinces were starved of finances for the nation-building departments which generally constituted the transferred subjects under responsible Ministers. There was a lot of protest both official and non-official against the wisdom underlying the award. Surendranath complained of the financial injustice done to Bengal in the Meston Award. Nevertheless in the field of local self-government and public health and sanitation, he did make many notable improvements. These might not have been up to the public expectation, but were certainly a good beginning, a sound base for any future administration to build upon. Surendranath says that, given more resources, more could have been achieved for the nation-building departments which were in his and his colleagues' charge. Several water supply schemes, for instance, could not be implemented for want of funds. He did not think that the difficulty was inherent in the system itself. On the contrary, he found the Governors helpful and cooperative and the Government itself a happy team on the whole.

The Ministers gave their opinions on the reserved subjects as well, even though the Government was not bound by the same.

Regarding the achievements of the Liberals under diarchy, Zaeharias says: "It must be gratefully admitted that they rendered very valuable services by not letting the national cause go by default in these legislatures. They were able to give wide publicity to grievances and by their cooperation improved many Government proposals; they initiated not a few new developments and their record in general was such that they would have proved valuable acquisitions in any Parliament".¹²²

The first three years of the Reforms were very eventful, and before the second elections under the new Act were due, the broad canvas of the national scene had undergone considerable change. The full tide of non-cooperation had started ebbing since Chauri-Chaura. Frustration prevailed in many quarters because of the sudden ealling off of the movement. Uncertainty overcast the politieal horizon. Gandhiji's arrest created a leadership void. The country was in need of a new programme, a new push forward. Many patriotic people began to doubt the wisdom of Council boycott. Many others felt that they could more ably replace those who had got into the Councils taking advantage of the Congress boycott. C. R. Das's views on Council entry have already been referred to. He was in favour of entering the Councils to offer "uniform, continuous and consistent obstruction" from within. In the context of this confusion, uncertainty and frustration, emerged the Swaraj Party with Council entry as its first policy plank, facilitated by a permissive resolution passed by the Congress. Das

¹²² *Renaescent India*

and Motilal Nehru were unmatched in their stature and leadership and had their way. Within a year the Congress was thus brought to their own point of view. The Swarajists did not differ from the Congress in aim but in method. Obstruction was the essence of their political strategy. It was non-cooperation all the same but in a different form.

CHAPTER XXI

THE LAST DAYS

The greatest challenge to the old, constitutional polities of Surendranath and his colleagues came from Gandhiji to whose keeping and care the Indian people now increasingly chose to entrust the country's destiny. Gandhiji opened up new horizons before the people. As already noted Surendranath had tried peaceful agitation, passive resistance and non-cooperation earlier in his career whenever occasion demanded, though he was not a believer in non-cooperation as a principle of political faith. But Gandhiji brought into his concept of non-violent non-cooperation a new mass appeal and a moral fervour which had a revolutionary impact on his countrymen. In him a people writhing in anguish and humiliation found a new Messiah of deliverance. The second challenge to Surendranath came from Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das, another dynamic personality who, within the short period he had been in politics, brought about radical changes in the outlook of the Congress and in the country's political affairs.

Throughout Surendranath's autobiography and also in some of his speeches, there are highly critical references to the non-cooperation movement and its leadership. According to him the fact that the movement had to be suspended following Chauri-Chaura and almost all the items of its programme had to be withdrawn only proclaimed its failure. Surendranath also says that non-cooperation was responsible for hatred and violence and particularly Hindu-Muslim disunity.

Gandhiji's mixing up of the Khilafat issue with Con-

gress politics was not liked by many including Surendranath and other moderate leaders. Surendranath felt that this would ultimately defeat its own purpose and lead to communal disharmony. Initially there were hardly any differences of a basic nature between Gandhiji and the moderate leaders regarding the Reforms. But following the Government's condonation of the Punjab wrongs, Gandhiji finally changed his mind. And then the irresistible magic of his personality and his unparalleled moral fervour set popular imagination afire. Surendranath and Gandhiji could not come closer together. Nevertheless, Gandhiji had a high admiration for Surendranath as one of the founders of the Congress, as a pioneer nationalist and as "one of the makers of modern India".¹²³

With C. R. Das, Surendranath's differences were equally vital, possibly more. While making appreciative reference to Das's ability, tact and judgment, Surendranath is highly critical of the policies and methods, notably the "obstructionist" methods, followed by C. R. Das. Das had been rising spectacularly in his political stature in the country, particularly in Bengal, gradually but inevitably replacing Surendranath, the "idol of Bengal", as Gandhiji calls him,¹²⁴ from the position of unquestioned supremacy he had been holding. Since the Montague declaration, C. R. Das had become loud in his denunciation of the Moderates, including Surendranath. But we have it on the authority of P. C. Ray that during his last days C. R. Das's attitude towards Surendranath had mellowed considerably. He asked Ray to review *A Nation in Making* for his organ, *Forward*, and later sent him a telegram asking him not to be "too hard on Surendranath".¹²⁵

¹²³ *Bengalee*, August 9, 1925

¹²⁴ *Autobiography*

¹²⁵ *Life and Times of C. R. Das*, P. C. Ray

The second elections under diarchy were held in the autumn of 1923. The Congress ban on Council entry having been lifted, the Swarajya Party was now free to contest seats in legislatures which they did with all the vigour and resources at their command. Pandit Motilal Nehru and Deshabandhu Chittaranjan toured the United Provinces. The latter made a rapid tour of Bengal appealing for support for the Swarajya Party nominees and receiving hearty response. The Swarajists did very well in the elections and emerged as the biggest party in the Bengal Legislature. Through C. R. Das's strategy of winning over some other members, the party was able to command a majority. Some of the well-known leaders were worsted. The Liberals were wiped out. In Bengal, the biggest defeat was that of Surendranath and that too at the hands of Dr. B. C. Roy, then a comparatively unknown figure in Bengal politics but having the backing of the Swarajists. Surendranath's office acceptance was one of the main points of attack against him in the election campaign. A long and eventful career thus ended in defeat and discomfiture. It was the fall of a Titan.

Surendranath thus faded out of the public life which he had dominated for nearly half a century. Public opinion has been said to be a frail reed to lean upon. Nobody was more conscious of the quick-changing nature of public opinion than Surendranath himself. Standing rock-like in the midst of the changing currents of popular moods and opinions. Surendranath refused to seek easy popularity at the cost of his life-long principles. He had to reap the bitter harvest. In a different context he says : "The idol of yesterday is the demon of today, ruthlessly trodden in the dust".¹²⁶ The head and front of his offence, as he him-

self says, was that he was a member of the Government. A campaign was so worked up against him and the public mood had changed so radically that he had to pay dearly for adhering steadfastly to his faith in constitutional means.

Following his defeat in the election, Surendranath retired from public life and devoted himself entirely to journalistic work and also to, what was more important, completing his reminiscences. *A Nation in Making*. He had begun writing the book in 1915 but had left it unfinished due to the rough and tumble of political life. In good health even at that age and with an extraordinarily sharp memory, he went on writing day in and day out at his Barrackpore country house, far from the madding crowd's noise and strife. Since its publication in 1925, the book has become a classic as a political autobiography. In it Surendranath has not only portrayed, in his inimitable style, his own long and eventful life and ideas but also left us a vivid account of the early beginnings and growth of the national movement. Specially valuable are the many sketches of well-known as well as lesser-known contemporaries whom the later generations have tended either to forget or belittle. Surendranath claims to have had "a high patriotic purpose" in writing the book and wanted to warn the nation against the perils and temptations which beset the path of its onward march. The book bears evidence of Surendranath's deep knowledge of history, politics and literature.

The end of his eventful, dynamic life, crowned with magnificent achievements but culminating in defeat and denigration, came on August 6, 1925.

CHAPTER XXII

SUMMING UP

It is not easy to assess a career so dynamic, so varied, so full of achievements and yet, latterly, so controversial. In doing so, however, certain broad facts have to be kept in mind. Surendranath's political career began as far back as a decade before the birth of the Indian National Congress. Political consciousness was then vague and inchoate. He belonged to a generation of Congressmen who drew their inspiration from liberal British political thought and institutions and on whom the influence of English culture, language and politics was writ large. They were grateful to the British for the manifold blessings they had brought to India and had a deep faith in the broad-mindedness of the British people. Self-government within the Empire therefore continued to be the creed of many Congress leaders even after the exit of Liberals.

Surendranath himself summed up his political creed and methodology thus: "I have preached patriotism coupled with orderly progress. I have preached self-government within the Empire as our goal and constitutional and lawful methods as the only means for its attainment."¹²⁷ Like the leaders of his generation, Surendranath too had faith in the bonafides of the British. There were occasions when that faith was rudely shaken. The Partition of Bengal was one such occasion. Still he stuck to his faith—pathetically, some might say. For instance,

¹²⁷ *A Nation in Making*

he found no reason to question the bonafides of Montague and thus to reject the Reforms, contrary to the prevailing mood of the country in those days.

Generally speaking, he was averse to anything but constitutional methods, whose efficacy he had no reason to question. Any other method, revolutionary or non-cooperative, he felt, might be self-defeating. For one thing, there was no chance of revolutionary methods succeeding. He says : "A revolutionary movement had indeed been tried in Bengal... and it failed; and the principal actors in that unhappy episode, recognising their failure, have for the most part settled down as peaceful citizens... In modern times, revolutionary movements have only been successful with the aid of trained and organized armies. Where is the army to assist the Indian revolutionary?"¹²⁸

Surendranath was neither for unalloyed cooperation, nor for unalloyed non-cooperation. Opposition where necessary, cooperation where possible—this was his principle. He claims to have been "one of the earliest apostles" of the cult of non-cooperation. As a mark of protest against the action of the Barisal authorities, he resigned his office of Honorary Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta and Honorary Magistrate of Barrackpore. Earlier, in 1899, he resigned as Municipal Commissioner of Calcutta as a mark of protest against the undemocratic Municipal Act. He led successfully one of the most fervent popular agitations, namely, the agitation against Partition, refusing to enter the Councils until the vivisection of his province was undone. But he did not favour a persistent policy of non-cooperation, an opposition for opposition's sake. To quote him : "There are occasions when we must non-co-operate and follow it up as a protest. But I altogether repudiate a persistent policy of non-cooperation, especially...

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when the Government is prepared to move along progressive lines, though the pace may not be as rapid as we should like it to be."¹²⁹ To Surendranath, non-cooperation was a negative concept, a philosophy of denial. He felt that non-cooperation would let loose forces of disorder and hatred which would harm the country's cause by leaving behind trails of bitterness. He would justify it neither ideologically nor on grounds of practical politics.

Surendranath thought he had ample reasons for sticking to the constitutional method. Its achievements were not too few or too small. In his last letter to Surendranath written from Baroda in 1909, R. C. Dutt said: "What a wonderful revolution we have seen within the life-time of a generation! What progress in the thoughts and ideas of a nation and what a noble part you have played in leading that change!"¹³⁰ The panorama of events since Surendranath's appearance on the country's glimmering political scene till the time of the Montague Reforms shows gradual, but far-reaching, changes in the affairs of the country. in the enlargement of public opinion, in broadbasing local self-government, in the development of a vocal press, even in progress towards self-government—all these building the base for the more radical movements of later days.

Even the Liberals' idea of constitutional methods broadened with the passage of time. Gokhale explained that constitutional agitation had a very wide connotation including almost everything except rebellion, resort to crime and aiding and abetting external invasion, and not excluding passive resistance. Thus Surendranath became the central figure in the Partition movement describ-

¹²⁹ *A Nation in Making*

¹³⁰ *Bharat Gaurah* Bankim Chandra Surendra Nath (In Bengali). Kamala Devi

ed by Gokhale as "the tremendous upheaval of popular feeling" constituting "a landmark in the history of our national progress".¹³¹ This movement he led on the lines of passive resistance, despite his basic faith in constitutional methods. He was one of the sponsors of the idea of boycott of foreign goods and of using *Swadeshi*—an idea endorsed by the Congress as a whole and later taken up by Gandhiji. But he strongly disapproved of the extension of boycott to schools, colleges and legislatures.

Surendranath believed that India's dissociation from the Empire would do her no good. On the contrary, he wanted to assert India's legitimate rights as an autonomous unit of the Commonwealth on a footing of equality with other members thereof and on the basis of the British ideal of constitutional freedom. On his return from England in September 1919, he was invited to address the Calcutta Rotary Club which was mostly European in character. He said: "The Empire is yours; but it is also ours. It is yours by creation; ours by adoption. You are the natural heirs; we are the adopted children of the Empire. Your status and our status are the same; and here let me make a confession of faith on my behalf as well as the great party to which I belong".¹³²

Why did Surendranath accept office? This has been one of the most crucial questions regarding his life and career. How the old veteran of many a battle could agree to accept a docile ministership under Government, may appear baffling on the face of it. Surendranath has been unfairly accused by some of having yielded to the lure of knighthood and office. He has been painted as a deserter, a "lost leader". But assuming that Surendranath hankered after the

¹³¹ *Presidential Address at the Benares Congress, 1905*

¹³² *A Nation in Making*

grandeur and fascination of office, he could as well have co-operated with the Government earlier and that co-operation would have been readily accepted. But he chose to remain an arch agitator, almost a seditious in official estimation, until he felt that the time was ripe for offering co-operation to the Government in the interest of nation-building and, as far as possible under the circumstances, to save the people from their daily degradation under the alien rule.

"Agitate, agitate, agitate"—this in fact was his war cry. Though a constitutionalist, he was also a persistent, indefatigable agitator, on the platform, in the press, when the occasion demanded. That is why he was dubbed an instigator of the youth. When, however, he felt that the occasion had come for wholehearted cooperation with the Government, he did offer it, even at the cost of his popularity and public career. "I owe allegiance to God and my people"—with this, his life-long cry, he felt that even the limited opportunities offered by the Reforms could be made good use of for the sake of the people. If Deshabandhu had come round to the idea of responsive cooperation and if even Tilak latterly advocated self-government within the Commonwealth, it was certainly not unusual for Surendranath to have accepted office under a scheme which he believed was useful in the prevailing circumstances.

It was not self-aggrandisement which led him to the steps of the Government House. It was his selfless devotion to public service that brought him to a new field of experience. The young Surendranath's fire and fervour had by that time matured into the constructive zeal of a missionary. What he achieved within three years in office, under limitations and in the face of persistent opposition and abuse, has already been referred to.

Surendranath's greatest contribution was his indefatigable labour for forging Indian unity and nationhood. He anti-

cipated the birth of the Congress through his many-sided and vigorous public activities which mainly centred round the Civil Service question, the Vernacular Press Act and Ilbert Bill agitation and through his all-India tours and speeches. The main purpose of all these was to bring all India on a common political platform with a common programme of action. Right from the beginning of his career, his dream had been that of an all-India nationality, into which the bewildering variety of religions, languages and cultures would be knit together in perfect harmony, thus providing a living, throbbing illustration of unity in diversity. The idea of a secular, democratic India with a parliamentary form of government was a master passion with him. The themes of his early speeches were carefully chosen to rouse the national spirit. These were : Indian history, Indian unity, Chaitanya, Mazzini and the Sikhs. Upon his youthful mind the writings of Mazzini, the apostle of Italian unity, had produced a profound impression, and he preached to the students Mazzini minus revolution with telling effect, so that the cause of Indian unity might be promoted. In an obituary notice after his death, the *Modern Review* (September 1925) wrote thus : "The speeches and writings of no other political leader in India have harped more often and more insistently on the united India ideal." Many of the essential and invaluable ingredients of the modern Indian democracy the country owes to Surendranath's foresight and political vision.

He looked upon the service of the motherland as "the highest form of religion" and would consider no sacrifice too great for the country's cause. Even his personal bereavement was nothing compared to the irresistible call of public duty. The story of how he attended the inaugural meeting of the Indian Association under the gloom of a personal bereavement, that is, his son's death, has already been told.

His wife died on December 23, 1911, but he attended the Congress session on December 26 and took active part therein. Throughout his life he was always at the forefront of public movements and activities. He tried vigorously to build up traditions of healthy public life. The fact that he was twice President of Congress is an inadequate description of his role *vis-a-vis* the Congress. President or not, year after year, he was the central figure in the Congress sessions and made valuable contributions to its proceedings. It was he who declared the Congress to be "the non-official Parliament of the Nation"; it was he again who called it the "Congress of united India", which had been able to bring together "the scattered elements of a vast and diversified population" and welded them into a compact and homogeneous entity. In this great achievement he had his own significant share. That perhaps is his greatest claim to the country's gratitude.

It is true that he eventually drifted away from the mainstream of nationalism—in politics there is always scope for honest difference of opinion. But whatever his later political transformation might have been, the fact remains that he was foremost among those who built the early foundations of nationalism. He was a master architect of Indian unity, the father of political consciousness in India.

Surendranath's social views call for a brief mention here. Almost wholly preoccupied with politics, Surendranath had hardly had time actively to interest himself in social questions. He had however expressed a desire that after his retirement from politics, he would devote himself to the movement for the amelioration of the condition of Hindu widows, a movement which was started by Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar and had left a deep impression upon his youthful imagination. When Vidyasagar's great message failed to bear fruit, he cried in his youth: "When will that mes-

sage be fulfilled?" The hands of death snatched him away before he could take up the mantle of Vidyasagar, much as he would have liked to do so.

"Orthodox Hinduism" did not appeal to Surendranath. His social ideas were "progressive". He was convinced that the society was changing, as evidenced by the loosening of caste restrictions and the removal of various taboos. In social matters, as in political, he was in favour of evolutionary progress; a revolutionary change, he felt, would suddenly dislocate the existing order of things and might even be rejected by the people.

Surendranath had a spotless character. In personal life he was kind and generous, had a deep religious trend in himself and a broad human sympathy for others. He did not hesitate to help even his political adversaries. There were instances when he exercised his good offices to help the revolutionaries in their distress, despite his strong dislike of violent and revolutionary methods. Deeply influenced by English culture and civilization, Surendranath nevertheless remained an Indian till his last days in his dress, habits and manners. He was unassuming and easily approachable; he made no distinction between the high and the low. He was an embodiment of regularity. Even at his ripe old age he used to take regular physical exercise. In respect of drink and smoking he was a total abstainer and even at official functions he was very selective about his food. Shortly before his death he had become physically weak but remained mentally alert. He expressed the hope that he would live for another ten years to bring the political parties together to form a big confederation of all of them.¹³³ It was not for nothing that Gandhiji called him a "fighter".

Few excelled him in heroism, in the nobility of character and self-sacrifice, in lofty patriotic passion, in selfless missionary zeal and in organising ability.

¹³³ "Surendra Nath", by Rajendra Nath Mukherjee, *Monthly Basumati* (In Bengali). Bhadra, 1332

APPENDIX I

EXTRACTS FROM THE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS OF SURENDRANATH AT THE POONA CONGRESS 1895

1. Legislative Councils

Hitherto we had placed the reform of the Legislative Councils in the forefront among our topics of discussion. Then came the Councils Act of 1892 which reconstituted the Councils and enlarged their functions. What is our attitude with regard to this Act? Are we satisfied with it and with the manner in which it is being worked? I am afraid we must answer the question in the negative. We regard the measure in the light of a cautious experiment which is being tried by the Government. Caution is an element of statesmanship. But caution carried to an excess—caution which is but another name for timidity—is a mistake, and may even amount to a blunder. We have no objection to the Government exercising due caution before it takes “a big jump into the unknown”. Weighted with the sense of its great responsibility, the Government must look around before it makes an important departure from the lines of its ancient policy. But what we complain of is that the experiment might have been tried under conditions more favourable to its success, more consonant to the declarations which were made in Parliament by statesmen on both sides of the House at the time of the enactment of the measure. Mr. Gladstone looked forward to a living representation of the Indian people. Lord Salisbury was anxious that the machinery provided should give

representation not to small sections of the people but to the living strength and the vital forces of the whole community. Have these anticipations been realized by the light of accomplished facts? In Bengal seven elected members represent the living strength and the vital forces of a whole community of 70 millions of people. The Councils have been enlarged, but in no sense so as to provide even a tolerably moderate representation of the people. In the United Kingdom a population of 40 millions is represented by 670 members. In Bengal, a population of 70 millions is represented by only seven elected members, or, if you like, by 10 members if you take the nominated non-official members to represent the people, or by 20 members if you take the whole Council to represent the province. The result is that the election is taking place under a system of rotation, whole divisions are left unrepresented in the Council. Out of the six Divisions in Bengal at the present moment the Presidency Division, which is the most important, and the Chhota Nagpur and Orissa Divisions are left out in the representation. I am aware that this is a faulty arrangement which might be rectified by lumping up the Divisions, as is done elsewhere, so as to enable the whole Province to take part in the elections. But is it possible under any conceivable arrangement, by any form of administrative manipulation, to secure, in the words of Mr. Gladstone, the living representation of the Indian people, or, in the words of Lord Salisbury, the representation of the whole community, and not of small sections of the people, without materially adding to the strength of the elective element in the Councils?

2. Finance

If your Legislative Councils are an important matter for your consideration, your finances form the back-bone of

your administration. Tell me, said John Bright in substance, in one of his speeches, what the financial condition of a country is, and I will tell you all about its Government and the condition of its people. The financial test is the most crucial. Judged by it our position is truly deplorable. It is no exaggeration to say that the financial position of India is one of ever-recurring deficit and of ever-increasing debt. I should be sorry to say one word which would convey to the mind of anyone an exaggerated notion of the difficulties by which the Government of India is surrounded. Let there be "Naught extenuate or aught set down in malice." But I think I am strictly within the limits of truth when I say that, so far as our financial position is concerned, debt and deficit represent the order of the day. Let me ask you to follow me as I rapidly glance over a few facts and figures in connection with the financial history of the sixty years from 1834 to 1894. During this period you have had 34 years of deficit amounting in round numbers to 83 crores of rupees, and 26 years of surplus amounting to 42 crores of rupees in round numbers, with the net result that you have a net deficit of about 41 crores of rupees, which makes an average deficit of something over sixty-five lacs of rupees per year. Our debt kept pace with our deficit. They are twin sisters which march apace. It must be so in the nature of things. An ever-increasing deficit must produce an ever-accumulating debt. During the same period the Public Debt increased from 26 crores to 210 crores; and 42 crores of this amount were incurred within the last ten years. If we are not bankrupts, at any rate we are on the high road to it. If an ordinary individual found that his expenditure was steadily increasing, that his income was not increasing in the same proportion, that his resources were strained to the utmost, and that his debt was fast accumulating, he would feel that he was perilously near bank-

ruptcy. But I suppose Governments are not like ordinary mortals. They do not participate in the common feelings and the common failings of our ordinary human nature—and hence the optimism of our rulers.

What is it that has brought the country to its present deplorable financial position? The answer must be that it is in the main the aggressive military policy of the Government. The depreciated rupee has much to answer for: it is responsible for many sins of omissions and commission, but it is not wholly nor even mainly chargeable with the present financial embarrassments of the Government. Sir Auckland Colvin in a recent article in the *Nineteenth Century* observes that the increase of Indian expenditure from 1883-84 to 1892-93, amounting to about 11 crores of rupees, was due to three causes, and he regards the Military charges as the first and foremost of these (vide page 873, *The Nineteenth Century* for November). In the course of the same article he observes: "There can be no improvement in Indian finances so long as Indian revenues are depleted by the claims of frontier extension, or exposed to the risk and requirements of war."

3. Industries

Ours is a political organisation; but we cannot overlook considerations which affect the development of our industries and our manufactures. The economic condition of a people has an intimate bearing upon their political advancement. Looking at the matter from this point of view we feel that it is our duty to safeguard our industries. Their conservation is a matter of grave national importance. We have our cotton industry in Bombay, the jute industry in Bengal, the tea industry in Assam and the coal and iron industries in Central and Southern India. Factory Acts which have hitherto been understood to be framed for the

protection of operatives are now sought to be used for the avowed object of restricting and raising the cost of production. "Pressure," I understand, "is now to be put upon the Secretary of State to ignore the interests of the people of this country and to order a Factory Act for India which will prevent our mills from competing with those in England." Lancashire people engaged in the cotton industry have attacked the cotton industry in India, insisting on a stricter Factory Act and shorter working hours, quite oblivious of the hardships this would obviously entail on the people of India generally, and overlooking the fact that Japan is already a serious rival to India as well as England. Then the jute manufacturing industry has been threatened by the jute manufactures in Dundee, on the plea that their trade is suffering from the competition of the Indian mills. They too seem to forget the important factor that there are many jute mills on the continent of Europe and go straight for the Indian mills, because they are under the British Government.

4. Financial Drain

The question of the wider employment of our countrymen in the public service is, to my mind, more or less a financial problem. It is intimately connected with the question of the poverty of the people. That is the view of Mr. Dadabhai Naoroji; that was the view of the late Mr. Robert Knight, than whom there was not an abler financial expert or a more ardent friend of the people of India. The considerations bearing upon the point are obvious. The more of the foreign element there is in the public service, with the high pay which must necessarily be given to them for service in a foreign country, the more you widen and deepen that channel by which the wealth of the country flows out—the greater is the impetus you give to that drain which is

going on and which has gone on for the last hundred years and more, and which is more or less incidental to the present state of things. A part of the salaries of these highly-paid officials must be spent out of the country, for the support of their wives and children, while they are yet in the service; and when they have retired, the whole of their pensions, with exceptions which hardly call for notice, must be spent abroad. This means the loss of this portion of the national wealth which is absolutely indefensible, if substantially service of the same quality could be obtained by employing the children of the soil. The employment of a foreign element in the public service of a country, with the prospect of the salaries of these public servants leaving the country, is morally wrong, economically disastrous, and politically inexpedient, unless it is evident that the gain in other respects outweighs the financial loss, or in the end averts greater financial loss than what is incidental to the employment of this foreign agency. (Hear ! hear !).

5. Employment of Indians in the Services

We claim to be admitted to all competitive examinations for the Indian Services, no matter to what particular department of the public service they may refer. We claim to be admitted to the Competitive Examinations for the Police Service held in India as well as in England. We claim to be admitted to the Examinations for recruitment to the higher offices in the Forest Department. We are excluded from these Examinations, and we are excluded because we are natives of India. (Shame ! shame !). Our disqualification is our race. The crime of colour is alleged against us. We are supposed not to possess the qualities required for these services, by reason of our being members of the race to which it is our misfortune to belong. But there are so many races in India. (Laughter). Do they all suffer from the

same disqualification—are they all wanting in the precious qualities required for these services? For the exclusion applies to them all. A slur is thus put upon us. But we are not ashamed of our nationality. We are proud that we are Indians; some of us are the inheritors of a civilization which carries the mind back to the dawn of human civilization. (Hear! hear!). But we are also British subjects. *Civis Romanus sum* was the boast of the ancient world. It is our proud privilege to be British subjects, and we claim the rights which belong to our political connection. (Cheers). We are confident that the English people will not permit the perpetuation of invidous distinctions of race in the government of their great Dependency. Themselves free men, all in the enjoyment of equal rights and equal privileges, their natural instinct would be to extend to others the blessings which have made them so great, so happy, and so prosperous. (Cheers).

In this connection it is impossible not to refer to the exclusion of our countrymen from the commissioned ranks in the Army. The bravest Native soldier, a born warrior, and though he may have in him the making of a great Captain, cannot in these days rise beyond the rank of a Subadar-Major or a Ressaldar-Major in the British Army. A Shivaji, a Hyder Ali, a Ranjit Singh, a Madhoji Scindia, could not now have risen to the position of the Colonel of a Regiment or the Captain of a Company. (Laughter). This ostracism of a whole people, this exclusion of the representatives of the Military races in India from high command in the Army, cannot add to the strength and the stability or the greatness of the Empire.

6. The Congress and Congressmen

Today is the first day of the eleventh session of the Congress. Many sessions of the Congress must yet be held

before even our moderate programme is accomplished. The car of human progress moves slowly forward. But he who has set his hand to the plough cannot afford to look back. He must spend and be spent in the cause. How many brave comrades, whose memories we mourn, have fallen; how many more will yet fall before the journey through the wilderness is accomplished, and we are in view of Canaan. To some choice spirits, elevated by faith and hope, may be vouchsafed, as was vouchsafed to Moses of old from the heights of Sinai, a glimpse into the promised land, a foretaste of that previous treasure of civil and political rights, which, in the Providence of God and under the auspices of English rule, is to be the destined heritage of their nation. As for the rest they must possess their souls in patience, supported by the undying faith that their cause, based upon the highest justice, must eventually triumph. 'A man with a conviction,' says John Stuart Mill in his *Essay on Representative Government*, 'is equal to ninety-nine without one.' The man of earnest faith is irresistible and all-conquering. We Congressmen know what we are about; we know our minds, we know our methods; we stick to them with resolute tenacity of purpose—with a faith which, so far as some of us are concerned, I will say, does not belong to the things of this world. And who will say that the future is not ours? (Hear! hear!).

We feel that in this great struggle in which we are engaged, the moral sympathies of civilized humanity are with us. The prayers of the good and the true in all parts of the world follow us. They will welcome as glad tidings of great joy the birth of an emancipated people on the banks of the Ganges. For have they not all read about our ancient civilization; how, in the morning of the world, before the Eternal City had been built upon the Seven Hills, before Alexander had marched his army to the banks of the Tigris,

before Babylonian astronomers had learnt to gaze upon the starry world, our ancestors had developed a great civilization, and how that civilization has profoundly influenced the course of modern thought in the highest concerns of man ? Above all, we rely with unbounded confidence on the justice and generosity of the British people and of their representatives in Parliament. (Loud cheers).

APPENDIX II

EXTRACTS FROM THE PRESIDENT'S CONCLUDING ADDRESS AT THE POONA CONGRESS, 1895

Gentlemen : The one regret which is deepest in my mind on this occasion is that my voice has been lost in your service at a moment when I needed its aid to the fullest extent to voice forth those deep sentiments of gratitude which at the present moment are surging in my mind. I feel myself overpowered by those emotions which the situation evokes. I ransack in vain the inexhaustible vocabulary of the English language to find words which would give expression to the deep-seated sense of thankfulness and gratitude which is over-powering me at this moment. If I could have lived for this moment and this moment alone, and then have breathed my last, I should have considered myself the happiest amongst men. I know you wish me long life (Cries of "yes, yes"). You have given eloquent expression to that sentiment. Whether it shall be long life or whether it shall be short life, whatever it may be, I call upon the Almighty God to witness this proclamation, this announcement, this solemn vow which I take before the eyes of assembled India. that it shall be dedicated to your service. (Loud cheers). Yea, it shall be dedicated to the fulfilment of those aspirations, those hopes, those ideas, which have been voiced forth by the united dignity and majesty of my nation; the last prayer which I shall address to the footsteps of the Almighty will be prayer for her political deliverance, for her enfranchisement, for her admission into the great confederacy of free States which are English in their origin. and English in their character, allied inseparably by union with England. Gentlemen, I know not how to thank you for the splendid hospitality of which I

and my brother-delegates have been the recipients. It is a hospitality unsurpassed in the brilliant record of Congress hospitalities. I could not have felt myself more comfortable in my home surrounded by those dear ones whom I love above all things in the world. I felt myself completely at my ease surrounded by those smiling faces devotedly serving me at all hours of the day and at all hours of the night. Youngmen, how shall I describe the loyalty, the attachment, the fond devotion which you have shown in that self-imposed work which is yours? (Loud cheers). Sprung some of you from the first families in Poona, with recollections which carry the mind back to the great days of Maharratta independence. (Hear! hear! and applause). You have served us like menial servants. And what was the inspiring motive? What was the dominating principle? Not love of applause, (no! no!) not love of show, not even the sentiment of hospitality, not even deference to superiors and elders, but the all-pervading conviction that the work in which you are engaged is your work (Cheers); that the work in which you are engaged is work in which you are likely the most to benefit. Some of us have grown grey in the service of the Congress. I was a young man when I became a Congressman. Now I am going down the vale of years. the shadows of the evening are deepening upon my life. Our mantles will fall upon you, and that work, which we have commenced, and which we have imperfectly carried out, will be entrusted to your care and to your keeping. (Cheers). That heritage of precious rights which we have received from the past shall be committed to you as a trust to be safeguarded by you, to be amplified by you for your benefit and your children's benefit, even unto remote generations. (Cheers)

APPENDIX III

EXTRACTS FROM PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS AT THE AHMEDABAD CONGRESS, 1902

1. Indian Industries

The industrial movement is flowing deep, fraught with national ideals. It partakes of the character of the parent movement. It follows in its footsteps with a truly filial piety. A widespread feeling has been roused in favour of the growth and expansion of indigenous arts and industries, and the distinguished men who organized the Industrial Exhibition in connection with the Calcutta Congress of last year have still further carried their high endeavour by opening a store-house for Indian goods. Our infant industries need protection. But the Government, wedded to the traditions of free trade, will not grant them protection. If however protection by legislative enactment is impossible, may we not, by the fiat of the national will, afford them such protection as may lie in our power, if we resolve in our heart of hearts to avail ourselves, wherever practicable, of indigenous articles in preference to foreign goods. Has not the time come when the scattered national impulses may be focussed into an organic and organized whole for a supreme effort for the promotion of our industries? May we not obtain a complete and comprehensive list of Indian articles available for our varied requirements and seek to encourage their manufacture and stimulate their expansion? I quite agree that the process is expensive. But it is of the essence of protection to incur present pecuniary sacrifice in view of future gain; and our national industries, placed on a sound and satisfactory footing, under a moral protection evoked

by a lofty spirit of patriotism, will, in their own good time, bring in an abundant harvest of gold. All sacrifice, incurred for high national purposes and towards the attainment of great national ideals, is repaid with compound interest. Such is the ordering of nature, the dispensation of Divine Providence: and the sacrifices we now make to restore our lost industries and to establish new ones will compensate us a hundredfold by enabling us to supply our own wants and to check in part at least that depletion of the national wealth which more than anything else has contributed to the appalling poverty of our people. Our industrial helplessness is even more deplorable than our political impotency.

2. Poverty of India

Is the country getting poorer day by day? The question can be set at rest by an open enquiry, started under the auspices of the Government. Why is not such an enquiry held? Ours indeed has been a Government of Commissions and Committees. We have had Commissions of all sorts. One more Commission to enquire into the economic condition of the country would not seriously aggravate the situation or dislocate the administrative machinery. The Famine Union in England, which include public men of all parties and which have an economic rather than a political object in view, have been pressing for an enquiry into some typical villages. It is in no hostile spirit that they approach the question. Their object is not to find fault, but to get at the truth. The Union desire an answer to the question whether it is true that the cultivator has been sinking deeper and deeper into poverty during recent years. But the Government will not give an answer, the Government will not hold an enquiry. Why does the Government decline to institute an enquiry for the settlement of what may justly

be regarded as the problem of problems? Has it any reasons to believe that such an enquiry would be fatal to its optimistic creed? It cannot indeed be said that the Government is without any information on the subject, or that it ignores the gravity of the problem. On two separate occasions it held two separate and confidential enquiries. There was an enquiry held in 1880-81 by Lord Ripon. Sir David Barbour was entrusted with it. There was again an enquiry held during the viceroyalty of Lord Dufferin. Now these enquiries either prove or disprove the allegation that the country is becoming poorer under British rule. If they disprove the allegation, nothing would be more natural than that the rulers of India should hasten, by their publication, to refute a charge which involves so serious a reflection upon their own administration. If these enquiries do not disprove the charge, nothing would be more natural than that they should keep back the evidence, of which they are in possession. To withhold from the public the results of these enquiries and the evidence on which they are based, raises a presumption against the roseate view of the economic situation. The presumption is strengthened by the steady refusal to hold an open enquiry, and it assumes more or less the complexion of definite proof in view of facts the significance of which cannot be overlooked.

3. New Imperialism

Imperialism blocks the way. Imperialism is now the prevailing creed. Imperialism has always been synonymous with autocracy—the rule of the despotic monarch or of the victorious general who has made his way to sovereign power. In ancient Rome, as in modern France, Imperialism meant the supersession of popular authority and the establishment of one-man authority. It means self-government for Great Britain and her colonies, autocracy for the rest of the British

Empire. What its latent possibilities are it is impossible to say. Whether in its further developments, it will lead to curtailment of democratic power is one of those secrets, hidden deep in the bosom of time, regarding which even the most confident predictions may prove futile. But all history bears record that the extension of territory and power over subject-races is fatal to popular Government. Let us not however speculate about the future. British imperialism implies the closer union—the more intimate federation between the English-speaking subjects of His Majesty. We stand outside the pale of federation. We are not admitted into this inner sanctuary of freedom. We are not permitted to enter the threshold of the Holy of Holies. We are privileged only to serve and to admire from a distance. As a part of the Empire, we sent out troops to South Africa, and they saved Natal. As a part of the Empire, we sent out troops to China, and our Indian soldiery planted the imperial standard on the walls of Peking. Our loyalty is admittedly so genuine, so deep and so intensely realistic that even the Secretary of State had no conception of it. All the same, we are not the children of the Empire entitled to its great constitutional privileges... In India Imperialism has accentuated the forces of reaction and has engendered a love of pomp and show which is apt to encourage extravagance and to withdraw attention from the graver issues of domestic reform. We are not therefore prepared to welcome the new Imperialism in the form and garb in which it appears to us. Mr. Gladstone's sound Liberalism, with its strenuous persistency in the matter of domestic reform, with its thorough recognition of England's grave responsibilities in relation to India, would be to us far more acceptable than the Imperialism which indulges in expensive pageants, but which turns a deaf ear to the cry of the coolies in the tea-gardens of Assam, which often subordi-

nates our interests to other interests and which relies for the justification of imperial rule upon the pomp and circumstances of imperial grandeur rather than upon the solid and enduring basis of truly imperial achievements.

4. Liberty

The triumphs of liberty are not won in a day. Liberty is a jealous Goddess exacting in her worship and claiming from her votaries prolonged and assiduous devotion. Read history. Learn from it the inestimable lesson of patience and fortitude and the self-sacrificing devotion which a constitutional struggle for constitutional liberty involves. Need I impress these lessons upon a people who have presented to the world the noblest of these virtues? Every page of Indian history is replenished with the touch of self-abnegation... The responsibilities of the present, the hopes of the future, the glories of the past ought all to inspire us with the noblest enthusiasm to serve our country...

APPENDIX IV

EXTRACTS FROM OTHER SPEECHES

On the Vernacular Press Act*

The question is not an Indian question. It is essentially an English question. The question is not whether a certain number of Indians should have the right of free speech. The question is broader, vaster, deeper far. The question is whether in any part of the British dominions... restrictions should be imposed upon the liberty of speech on any portion of Her Majesty's subjects. We claim this privilege not as a matter of favour. We are no longer the conquered subjects of England. We are the incorporated citizens of a free empire... The Act is against the instincts of Englishmen, against the genius of the British constitution... Under English influence India was waked to life. Under English auspices, the pulse of life is beating fast within her. But the present Act has prostrated, paralysed and overpowered her.

* * *

On Local Self-Government†

I regard the concession of Local Self-Government as the prelude, the precursor of national. (may I venture to hope) of imperial Self-Government. The seedling of liberty planted in the human soil has a tendency to shoot forth into a vast..... tree. There is development in all things; progress is the law of nature. There is above all an expansive force in the principle of liberty. May that principle grow and thrive till it has made itself felt in every de-

*April 1878

†February 1882

partment of Indian Administration. Whether the glorious consummation will take place soon, or whether it will be indefinitely postponed, must depend upon ourselves—upon our enthusiasm and devotion to the interests of our country. The repeal of the Vernacular Press Act has taught you what may be effected by agitation. My advice to you is—Agitate, Agitate, Agitate. You have yet to learn the great art of grumbling. When a great calamity or a terrible reverse overwhelms us, we calmly submit to our fate, and go straightway to Benares to effect our reconciliation with the superior gods. An Englishman, on the other hand, grumbles and complains, fights against the adverse fate, till his complaint has been remedied, or his grievance has been removed. The temperament of the Englishmen in this respect is worthy of all imitation, and above all it is useful in the domain of political agitation. Ladies and gentlemen, we have confidence in the sense of justice of the English people. England spent twenty crores of rupees to emancipate the Negro slaves. When Italy was struggling for her independence, England stretched out to her the hand of sympathy! Will she now refuse to her own dependency the great privilege of Self-Government? It is not however, the institutions but rather the men that make a nation. The national character shapes institutions of a people. A noble people, it has been truly remarked, can never have an ignoble government. It is for you to raise your countrymen to a higher intellectual and moral life, and then will your grievances be redressed, and the solid fabric of self-government be raised on the unchangeable basis of a nation's character, and on the deep and fervent faith that by self-government, and through it alone, can we work out the destinies that are in store for us, under the control of England and the orderings of an overruling Providence.

On the Amendment of the Press Act*

Sir, it is admitted on all hands that there has been a sensible improvement in the situation. the highest authorities in the realm have borne testimony to this effect. It is also admitted that there has been a change for the better in the tone and temper of the press. Our critics hostile to our interests and aspirations have ungrudgingly admitted the fact; that being so, I feel that I should be justified in demanding the repeal or at any rate a substantial modification of the Act, but I go no further than to invite the Council so to amend the Act as to remove a just cause for complaint, to carry out its declared intentions and to redeem the pledged word of the Government. In making this appeal, I speak not only as a Member of this Council but as one with whom journalism has been the cherished vocation of his life. We journalists feel as if the sword of Damocles was hanging over our heads. We may be right or we may be wrong, but that is our feeling. Ours is a noble calling and we are entitled to the whole-hearted support and sympathy of the Government. The newspaper press is the great organ for the ventilation of popular grievances. it is the safety-valve of the State, it is an instrument of popular and political education. It is the gift of British rule and we cherish it with affectionate ardour. Its liberty may degenerate into license but I venture to hold that the arm of the law, such as it is without being reinforced by the Press Act, is long enough to reach it and strong enough to deal with it. The amendment of the Press Act which I pray for, and after all it is not an amendment but is in entire conformity with the intentions of the framers of the Act, will, if accepted, go some way to soften the rigours of the law and remove a just source of anxiety and of uneasiness felt by the

great body of Indian journalists, and above all, Sir, it will proclaim to the world the unalterable determination of the Government to redeem its pledged word and to make justice to the aggrieved party the keynote of its policy, even when enforcing a measure of some severity deemed necessary by the Government in the supreme interests of the State.

* * *

On the Morley-Minto Reforms Scheme*

Can we overlook the wondrous change which has taken place in Asia; changes have been brought about by the victories of Japan over Russia, which had strengthened the confidence of Asiatics in themselves. We have a mighty wave sweeping over Asia which carries with it high ideals and aspirations. India would be false to herself, her ancient culture which she so largely imbibed, and the education she has received, if she did not feel revivified in the example of oriental nations struggling for consideration and self-government. On the top of all this excitement came a period of reaction, in which the legitimate aspirations of the people were ignored and trifled with. The people were counted as nothing, we were counted as nothing, we were good for nothing, and we were to do nothing; everything was to be done for us. The generous policy of Lord Ripon was reversed. Local Self-Government was modified, and the universities, centres of humane and beneficent influence, were officialised, despite the protests of the people. Then on the top of all came the crowning piece of folly—the Partition of Bengal. It is true the situation has been somewhat eased by Lord Morley's Reform, but this Reform scheme has given rise to some considerable diversity of opinion amongst us... The scheme contains no concessions which have not been

*Speech at Carlton Hall, London, July 1909

sought for. So far from the scheme being lavish, I still say that it does not come up to our expectations in regard to many matters which vitally concern the power of the purse. We want definite control at least over some of the great departments of the State; over sanitation, education, and the public work department. Are you not aware that hundreds of thousands of my countrymen die every year from preventable diseases, such as malaria and cholera? Yes, I think it is very shameful indeed. We have been pressing the importance of the matter upon the Government for years. We have cried aloud, but who will listen to us? If we had some effective control over finance, or at least over sanitary measures to be employed, I am convinced that we could prevent to some extent the appalling rate of mortality which desolates homes in Bengal. The expenditure on education is inadequate. The great bulk of it is not being spent for education at all but upon inspection. As for elementary education, well, the less said the better. If we had any control over finances in regard to education we should devote the money to a useful and a profitable purpose. We want the power of the purse and a definite and effective method of self-government. This we have not got: all the scheme does is—and let me be perfectly candid in the matter—to provide machinery by which representatives of the people would be in a position to bring to bear upon the Government not a direct influence but an indirect moral pressure.

APPENDIX V

EXTRACTS FROM EDITORIALS PUBLISHED IN THE "BENGALEE"

"A Common Political Programme"*

Referring to Col. Osborn's letter in the *Statesman* regarding a common political programme in India, the editorial says :

The distinguished publicist... will be glad to learn that he has been partly anticipated by the leaders of the public opinion in India and that already earnest efforts are being made to establish a common programme of political action among the different public bodies throughout the country. There has been of recent years such an awakening of public life that the whole country is now intersected by a net-work of associations some of which are distinguished for the zeal with which they seek to promote public interests.

* * *

"Mohamedan Advancement"†

It is with pleasure we notice that the Government of India has diverted its attention to the question of the advancement of our Mohamedan fellow-countrymen. We have always held—and we have as yet seen no reasons to modify our opinions—that the advancement of India means not merely the advancement of the Hindus or of the Mohamedans—but the advancement of both these two communities in knowledge, in culture and in those higher qualities which contribute to national greatness. With exceptions here and there

* November 7, 1885

† July 25, 1885

which marked the decline of Mohamedan power, it must be said that, on the whole the imperial sway of the Moghuls was distinguished by a beneficence and justice which many civilized nations would do well to emulate... On the whole it was just and beneficent, and whatever bitterness might have been created between the two races, by events which marked the decline of the Mohamedan power, it is time that it should now be forgotten.

* * *

“Annexation of Burma”*

In one of his recent speeches, Mr. Bright has described annexation as the most dangerous of fallacies and the most odious of crimes. The language is strong but is not stronger than what the circumstances of the case require. The annexation of Burma is not only morally indefensible but we venture to think that it will be found to have been a great political blunder. The policy of annexation in relation to Indian affairs has been tried and has been deliberately abandoned. In recent years Lord Lytton advocated such a policy and even practised it. But the Liberal Government lost no time in undoing his work and in restoring Candahar to its rightful possessor—the Ameer of Cabul. We are surprised that an attempt should now be made, and by such an experienced statesman as Lord Dufferin, to revive a policy that stands thoroughly discredited... In the annexation of Burma there has indeed been a departure from precedent and traditions, we know not how the Government will justify such a departure.

* * *

“The Congress”*

Calcutta witnessed a scene this week, such as it had never before witnessed, since it emerged into an imperial city. There was a gathering of nations from all parts of India. It was a scene unique in the history of the city and unique in the history of India. It was a gathering of nations such as perhaps India had never before witnessed... In the meetings of the Congress we saw before us personified the incarnate majesty of the nation... The aspirations for Indian unification which had been the dream of some of our patriots and which used to be scoffed by many now bid fair to be realized. The scattered units of Indian nationality have been brought together, and they promise to become a compact and homogeneous whole. A contemporary has thought fit to describe the Congress as a Hindoo Congress. It is strange that a Hindoo Congress should be presided over by a Parsee gentleman; and it is stranger still that the Hindoo Congress should have such a large element of the Mohamedan community.



CHRONOLOGY OF SURENDRANATH BANERJEA'S LIFE

1848, November 10 ..	Birth at ancestral house in Taltola region of Calcutta.
1853	Education began at a Pathshala. Later educated at Parental Academic Institution and Doveton College.
1868, March 3 ..	Sailed for England.
1869	Passed open competition examination for Civil Service.
1870, February ..	Death of father.
1871	Passed final Civil Service Examination. Posted as Assistant Magistrate at Sylhet.
1872-1874 ..	Trouble over Yudhistir case. Accused of dishonesty and giving false explanation. Enquiry and recommendation for dismissal.
April, 1874 to 1875 ..	Arrival in England to plead his case. Formally dismissed from service. Benchers' refusal to call him to Bar.
1875	Return to India. Took up teaching. Organised Students' Association.

1876, July 26 Helped establish Indian Association.

1877 Calcutta meeting to protest against the reduction of Civil Service age limit, March 24.
Surendranath's Upper, Western and Southern India tour.
Attended Delhi Assemblage as Press representative.

1878 Passing of Vernacular Press Act, March.
Surendranath led agitation against it.

1879, January Proprietor-Editor of *The Bengalee*.

1880-82 Repeal of Vernacular Press Act by Lord Ripon, Local Self-Government Resolution.

1882-83 Ilbert Bill agitation. Took over charge of Presidency Institution which later became Ripon College.
Contempt case and imprisonment, May, 1883.
Took lead in the creation of National Fund, July, 1883.
Organised first National Conference, December, 1883.

1884 Undertook another Upper India tour.

1885 Organised second National Conference at Calcutta, December 25. First session of Indian National Congress at Bombay, December 28.

1886 Second Congress at Calcutta. Surendranath moved resolution on reform of Councils.

1890 Visited England as a member of Congress delegation. April. Memorable speech at Oxford Union debate.

1893-94 Elected to Bengal Legislative Council. The new Bengal Council inaugurated, July, 1893. Moved resolution at Madras Congress on simultaneous examination, 1894. Participated in debate on students and politics, in Madras.

1895 Delivered a remarkable address as President, Poona Congress.

1896 Moved resolution in Calcutta Congress on famines. Sharp criticism of Government's policy of drain. Industrial exhibition encouraged by Surendranath as an adjunct to Congress session.

1897 Testified before Welby Commission in England. Amraoti

			Congress. Resolution on excesses of repressive measures moved by Surendranath. Sympathy for Natu brothers and Tilak.
1898	..	..	Curzon in India. Surendranath built house at Simultola, a health resort. Interested himself in bringing to book the European soldiers responsible for Dr. Sircar's death.
1899	..	..	Passing of the Mackenzie Bill after two years' debate in Bengal Council, September. Surendranath's resignation from Calcutta Corporation along with 27 other Commissioners as a mark of protest.
1900	..	..	Before attending Lahore Congress, Surendranath toured Punjab.
1900-01	..	..	<i>The Bengalee</i> became daily paper. Stood for Imperial Legislative Council but could not succeed due to official machination.
1902	..	..	President, Ahmedabad Session of Congress, 1902. Strong criticism of the educational policies of Lord Curzon's Government, with special reference to the universities.
1904	..	..	Made over proprietary right of Ripon College to a trust.

1905 Partition of Bengal. Storm of public protest led by Surendranath.

Partition announced on July 20. and made effective from October 16. Memorable Calcutta meeting of August 7. Swadeshi movement ushered in. Surendranath uncrowned king. October 16 observed as day of mourning. On Surendranath's suggestion foundation-stone of Federation Hall laid and National Fund raised. Surendranath moved resolution on Partition at Congress of 1905.

1906 Bengal Provincial Conference at Barisal dispersed, April. Police repression on peaceful processionists. Surendranath arrested and fined. Rise of revolutionary movement. Stormy Calcutta Congress.

1907 Surat split. Surendranath sided with the Moderate school.

1908 Surendranath's speech at Madras Congress on proposed reforms.

1909 Invited to Imperial Press Conference in London, June. Spirited defence of Indian Press in reply to Lord Cromer. Two

points stressed by him in many of his speeches were modification of Partition and grant of self-government to India.

Murder of Sir William Curzon-Wyllie.

Gloomy Congress of 1909 in the background of the disappointing Morley-Minto Reforms and the rise of Muslim separatism. Surendranath's speech, a dirge of disappointment.

1909-10 Surendranath's disqualification for Council entry having been removed by Governor, he refused to enter reformed Council until Partition was modified.

1911 Sponsored an anti-Partition memorial signed by Bengal representatives and submitted to the Viceroy. Lord Hardinge. Delhi Durbar on December 12, 1911.

Partition modified. Wild enthusiasm in Bengal. Surendranath was the hero. Wife's death on December 23.

1913 Entered Indian Legislative Council despite official barriers. Legislative career marked by strong advocacy of popular causes and opposition to Government highhandedness.

1915—1918 Change in political climate. Rise of new leadership. Home Rule League. Surendranath restrained from joining it. Question of passive resistance at Bombay A.I.C.C. meeting, July, 1917.

Surendranath's disapproval. Hitch between Surendranath and C. R. Das over Mrs. Besant's election as Congress President.

Montagu's announcement, August, 1917, and tour of India subsequently. Surendranath cross-examined. Montagu Chelmsford Report published, July, 1918. Moderate-Extremist difference. In Bengal difference between Surendranath and C. R. Das over the acceptance of the Reforms, July 1918. Surendranath and his principal Moderate colleagues abstained from joining Special Bombay Congress of 1918. Surendranath presided over Moderate Conference in Bombay in November, 1918. His strong support to Reforms in Council.

1919 Visited England as leader of Moderate deputation and testified before Joint Parliamentary Committee. As member of an official

committee, investigated the working of local bodies in England.

1920-21 Surendranath returned unopposed to Bengal Council, Knighthood conferred on him, January, 1921. Took oath of office as Minister in charge of Local Self-Government with Medical Department attached, January, 1921.

1921-23 Varied nation-building activity as Minister. Called Press Conference in July, 1921 and initiated policy of taking the public into confidence. Undid Mackenzie Act by getting the new Calcutta Municipal Bill passed, March, 1923. Calcutta Corporation greatly democratized. Before that started Indianization of services in the Corporation and Medical College and gave a boost to expansion of medical education.

Birth of Swaraj party with Council entry programme, January, 1923. Second elections under diarchy in autumn of 1923. Surendranath defeated by Dr. B. C. Roy.

1923-25 Retirement from politics and public life. Last days spent in journalistic work and in completing *A Nation In Making*. Death on August 6, 1925.

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